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IN THE WAKE  
OF THE WAR

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*First Edition*

# IN THE WAKE OF THE WAR

PARLIAMENT OR  
IMPERIAL GOVERNMENT ?

BY HAROLD HODGE M.A.

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## PREFACE

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**I**T may reasonably be objected to this book (1) that it is not a book ; (2) that most of what is said here has been said in other ways elsewhere ; (3) that one who has never been in Parliament can not be competent to criticise a parliamentary system.

It has however often been found convenient to put into book form that which is really a tract for the times, having none of the character of permanency which every book rightly so called must possess. There is no very serious fraud in giving such writing the external form usually associated with a book when there is no idea of deceiving a reader by appearances.

It is true that suggestions for the government of the Empire more or less similar to those here set out have been made by others. But absolute originality is hardly necessary to justify, or at any rate to excuse, contribution to a discussion of general interest at this time. The government of the Empire and the working of the parliamentary system is an urgent question to which statesmen and newspapers alike have gravely invited the public to turn their thoughts. Therefore, if any one has, or thinks he has, some-

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thing to say on the matter not perhaps new but said with at any rate a different emphasis from that used by previous speakers or writers, he can hardly be blamed for saying it.

As to the right to criticise Parliament in one who has never sat in Parliament there is another side to that matter. Grant that only a Member of Parliament, past or present, can know it from within, on the other hand it is extremely difficult to one who is or even has been within to know it from without. The inside view is necessary for understanding Parliament from the Parliamentarian's standpoint, but the outside view is as necessary and perhaps more valuable for judgment of the actual place of Parliament in the government and life of the nation.

The amateur builder of constitutions may be a fair mark for a mild joke. Certainly Mr. Sidney Low is right when he says in the *Edinburgh Review*: "Constitution-making in the study is easy enough." But he graciously adds: "but not on that account futile. It is desirable that all possible methods should be worked out in advance and considered." There is the justification for efforts of this kind—the need to try all sorts of ways probable or improbable. These efforts are not to be taken as practical statesmanship. The amateur giving himself the airs of the statesman, who will have to do what the writer plays at doing, does worse

than make himself look foolish. For him to trouble himself meticulously with every contingency, every circumstance the statesman must consider, to calculate carefully the chances of acceptance, to work out his scheme to the last detail as though it were going to be put into force to-morrow, is waste of time. When the day comes for the statesman to act he will certainly pay no attention to any of the amateur's pains. It is only by imagination that the amateur may hope possibly to do something that may help the statesman. If he is not too serious and does not let himself be stifled with detail, he may possibly throw out an idea here or a hint there, which the practical statesman may stop to consider. It is for the amateur to suggest, not to do. If he takes his effort responsibly, as though he had to carry out his own scheme, it will probably be at the cost of suggestion.

At any rate, one who is decisively past military age may plead that building constitutions in the air is not necessarily idleness in him : certainly he might be doing something much more mischievous. Possibly, too, he does other work than build constitutions.

Since writing this tract I have had the advantage of reading many recent books and articles on the question of Imperial Government. If I have not borrowed from them any specific ideas needing acknowledgment, it must not be

thought that I do not realise the value of these writings. A comparison of views is always helpful. References have purposely been kept out, since I know from experience the irritating effect of footnotes and references in a book obviously meant to be read rapidly. They merely pull the reader up quite needlessly. If anyone should take what is written here seriously enough to want to verify any of the references, I will gladly enable him to do so.

HAROLD HODGE.

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# IN THE WAKE OF THE WAR

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

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**A**FTER the war—after the deluge! Yet sympathise as every one must with this impatience at talk about anything after the war before we have won the war, it is certain there will be an after the war, though none knows if he will see it. Neither does it much matter whether he will or not : the country will go on, and whether a new era will rise upon the blood-red sunset will depend very largely on the thought taken while the war is going on. If we do not think until the war is over, we may find that we have put off thinking until too late. Having not looked before, we shall certainly pine for what is not. The future will then take care of itself, and that generally means that very little care is taken. Events will be our master, and the power to guide them will have gone from us.

One very often hears it said that it will be a new England after the war ; that nothing can ever be the same again. Will it be a new England ? The tendency when stress is passed to

relapse into the old ways is very strong. How soon the effect of a shock that had seemed completely to change a man wears off. Will it be a new England ? That is the great question. Will the tremendous lesson be lost on us ? Will all the exhortations of the Church pass unheeded, or will the people " turn unto the Lord their God ? "

The cynic will have a grand time indeed, if the effect of peace is but a gay re-action from an unwonted serious mood. The cynic has had his innings during the war, observing that neither Christianity, nor Church, nor science, nor philosophy, nor socialism, nor humanitarianism, nor any other thing has had any effect on belligerent opinion of the merits of the fight. All the German clergy, all the German philosophers, all the scientists, all the professors, practically all the socialists, are satisfied that Germany is right. All the Entente clergy, all our scientists, all our scholars, nearly all our socialists are satisfied that the Entente is right. The cynic must not have a second innings.

There is but one memorial really worthy of the great dead in this war, but one tribute worthy of those who have seen us through it—a better England and a better Empire.

It is one of the good sides of war that it brings into bold relief fine types which the dustheaps of a long peace obscure and deface. Many of us whose trade is in words know very well that the

writer and the talker have undeserved influence. In the sloth of peace they have an undue advantage over the man of action. The military type, especially, does not come by his own in the piping times. He is not good at making money, he is not slick at making speeches, he seldom can write well. But his deficiency in art is compensated by peculiar simplicity and sense of duty. He is an honest man and a gentleman. On the whole, too, a man of belief as against the wordster, who is a man of disbeliefs. When the time for action comes, not a few who have belittled the fighting man are glad to get behind him, and many more, who have had a sympathy with him which the times did not encourage, now openly rejoice in him. This military mood has accentuated the present re-action against the politician ; for the fighting man is, on the whole, non-political in most senses, but especially in the party sense. Thus his ascendancy fitted in well with the public mood of resentment against both parties. For long the Englishman has been getting away from politics and party ; there has been a deep feeling that the Parliamentary type counted for more than it was worth. With British ill-logic, he may clap hands at more of it in Russia, but he is well content to see less of it in England. The Parliamentary man could always "down" the other in speech, which does not persuade the silent man the more. Therefore, when the war burst

upon us and nothing was relevant but action, the public was very ready to turn and rend Parliament and Government alike. The real animus there was against Mr. Asquith's Government, whether Liberal or Coalition, was really more due to their being an epitome of regulation party politics than to their active mistakes or omissions. They were out of touch with the country because the country felt they were out of touch with the time. The exuberant welcome given to the new Government last year was due to the belief that a new order was coming in and the old politics going out. It could hardly fail to make an impression on the public that on the outbreak of war, when it mattered only what was done or left undone, parliamentary government was immediately put on one side ; there was no Opposition, and the approaching general election was put off immediately. It was all very well to say that this was an exceptional war measure. Why not be as efficient in peace as in war ? Inefficiency may not be so mischievous in peace as in war, but it is always mischievous. Following on this—at a long interval it is true—the public see a Government on non-parliamentary lines. They see government by four or at most five men with practically unlimited powers. They see men put in high administrative posts who had never been in Parliament—but who had had experience of the matters they were

going to direct. Some of them, too, were men who had hardly ever made a speech. Yet farther on and they see Ministers from India and the Dominions "coming," in Lord Curzon's words, "as members, for the time being, of the governing body of the British Empire." Also they see both parties agreeing in a moment on issues which had for generations divided them with an apparently deep animosity. They see "old Conservatives" and "advanced Radicals" alike accepting measures which year after year they had declared would be the ruin of the country, proposals which "on their honour they could not accept without betraying every political principle they had stood for during the whole of their parliamentary career." The public finds itself left to the conclusion that either these people were wholly unprincipled or the parliamentary and party business was all a make-believe, signifying almost nothing. Either view seems easily tenable, but the unreality of party politics perhaps the more probable. Certainly it is impossible any longer to take the old party distinctions seriously. It may be true that in a time of tense distress it is wise to acquiesce in much that one would ordinarily reject; but it will not do to pretend that things which were to be the ruin of the country in peace time can be harmless now. War will not justify the abandonment of the principles of a life-time. The truth



is, of course, as the public now sees, that there was never any question of the country being ruined, nor of standing up for principles; for the very good reason that neither party ever had any principles. The war has brought home to the public mind at any rate two things: that party politics paralyse effective action, and that we have no permanent Imperial Government. The spirit of unity amongst the constituent States of the Empire, which the war has emphasised, must be clothed on with a body.

Is this country, is the Empire, when the strain is off, going to slide back to the stale old party business, the game so absorbing to the players, so irritating to everyone else? Will the old haphazard relation between United Kingdom and Dominions be allowed to linger on? The British polity remain amorphous, inorganic? It hardly seems credible. These are things that matter. We shall be hopeless indeed, if, when the world is in the melting pot, learning nothing, forgetting everything, we pass the things that matter and reach backward to things that do not matter; if we trouble about parliamentary precedent and "Representative principles," and omit all the realities of government. Let us not imitate those impossible men who, when the world was in travail of a new order, when Cæsar was hammering that shapeless distorted mass, the Roman world, into an organic empire "with



the most painstaking solemnity were watching over every old ornamental scroll and every speck of dust on the constitution."



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## CHAPTER II

### THE PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM

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WE shall have at least a chance of knowing where we are in politics if we recognise that parliamentary government, as we have it now, is an entirely different thing from parliamentary government as it was even a few years ago. So different indeed that if we approved of it as it was then, we can hardly approve of it as it is now. But the continuity of name tends to blind us as to the fact. Men go on saying that they approve of parliamentary government, as though parliamentary government always meant and always would mean the same thing. Not only in trade is the old name a great asset. It is almost as valuable in philosophy and in politics. Keep the name, and new parties and new principles will have a very good chance of retaining the goodwill built up on their opposites. So long as the old name meets his eye as he passes, and sounds in his ear in conversation, the man in the street is likely to take for granted that the old label

covers the old sample. Something untoward must have happened to him personally to make him question it, which is precisely the present mood of the public in this country. We have, of course, all along been aware that the British constitution is quite a different thing on paper from what it is in fact. We are all accustomed to the text book distinction between what is legal and what is constitutional. Press and politicians gave us enough of that sort of dialectic at the time of the rejection of the Finance Bill by the House of Lords in 1909 to make it a commonplace for many years to come. The distinction is indeed too familiar to be appreciated. We take it as the most natural thing in the world that a legal right should stand and be lost by disuse at one and the same time. No-one denied that the House of Lords had the full legal right to reject the Finance Bill, but constitutionally they had lost it ; and, therefore, in view of the pundits, were justly punished by the country for exercising a right which the law had given and had never taken away from them. (In truth, of course, the country neither knew nor cared whether the Lords had acted legally or constitutionally or both or neither. It was simply that the Liberal flood tide of 1906, long dammed up by a Unionist Government that had outstayed its welcome, had not yet subsided.)

This distinction between "legal" and "con-

stitutional" is as fine a subtlety as any in metaphysics or theology without the excuse or the explanation of a transcendental mystery to be expressed. It is really a flat contradiction, and it would be much better to say so plainly. It would remove one obstacle in the way of the people knowing what they are doing when they use the political power which has been given them. Thus one sensible thing at least was done by the Parliament Act. It cleared the ground by making it illegal for the House of Lords to throw out a money Bill. They were no longer left with that power and at the same time deprived of it.

Bagehot, too, and others, have long since exposed the text book theories of the working of the British constitution. All the beauty of the wonderful machinery vanished in the clear light which showed the driving power to be quite other than that which the constitution or the constitutionalists contemplated; the wheels worked, but not at all as they ought to have done.

Thus most people are aware, or, at any rate, have an inkling, that there is a good deal of make-believe about Parliament and the constitution. But in a very dim way. The idea has always been that Parliament is the citadel of freedom; representative government the voice of the people; legislation the wisdom of the "three

estates." These articles of political faith the country has never understood and has long ceased to believe in. But it does not think enough about politics to disbelieve them or put any other belief in their place. In politics the average man is lazily agnostic. He supports the established order as the line of least resistance, indifferent except when his own personal interests are obviously affected, or when he realises that his country is in danger. Politics as such simply do not interest him.

The advantage such a man has in approaching a political inquiry is the freedom from prejudice which comes of indifference; the disadvantage is the intellectual indolence which also comes of it. These are two sides of the same mind. One side is unfortunately not a corrective of the other, but rather confirms it. The explanation why a man has not strong views or prejudices on any matter is usually that he does not care enough about it to form a view at all. It is seldom balance of judgment or neutrality. Where does one find a man or woman who quietly thinks a question out and deliberately concludes that the arguments each way balance, and that, therefore, he can not express an opinion? Such a mind one could respect indeed, but it would not be human, and, therefore, it would fail in attempting to deal with humans. That is not at all the situation we have to deal with, when

we want to get the average man to look politics in the face and see things as they are. We have to get behind a disposition to take things for granted, we have to make the man think for himself ; to replace a contented, or, at any rate, idle, scepticism with a discontented concern. The Englishman of to-day acquiesces in parliamentary government as he acquiesces in the night following day, or in the " beastly English weather." He supposes it was always so, and always will be.

But parliamentary government is not a law of nature—and it is still more difficult to conceive it a law of God—it was not always at all, still less was it always as it is now. As everything else human, it varies, changing with time and men's manners ; it may be good for one people, bad for another ; good for one age, very bad for the next. We are not concerned here to arraign parliamentary government abstractly as a system, which would probably be but an idle process. It is impossible to abstract a political system from its circumstances ; hence the inquiry whether aristocratic or democratic government, a representative or a Cæsaristic system, is better in itself—necessarily better at all time and independently of circumstances—is barren. It can result in no conclusion. It may be a very wholesome exercise in dialectic for undergraduates, but men and women of



action will hardly have the patience to pursue it. It is not their business. The philosopher may have time for it, and if he have also the brains he may help to get a little nearer the truth ; and he will have done a very great thing. For there is no other way of showing that any form of government is absolutely the best but somehow logically to connect it with absolute truth, or at any rate to raise a presumption of such a connection. Kingship apart, divine sanction can not be invoked for any form of government, and only with great difficulty even for any course of policy. The practical man of affairs cannot concern himself with first principles in politics, for the simple reason that either there are none or they have not been discovered, and are certainly not discoverable by any method of experience. This is not saying that morality and religion have no touch with politics. A man's conduct as a citizen or as a politician, as in every other sphere, will be coloured by his moral character. So far as his religion is effective, he will be guided by consideration of right and wrong in public life as in private life. But between two possible political courses he will usually be unable to deduce from Christian principles which course he ought to follow. Or, to put it more practically, seeing that most people seem to make "Christian principles" mean pretty well what they will, it is impossible to say

which course Christ himself would have followed. Generally, we cannot say that either is right or either is wrong. Everybody knows and admits that at any time there are as many good Christians on one side of a political controversy as on the other. Christianity does not help them to choose. It is only the sourest of partisans or the most fanatical devotees or opponents of a policy that regard those who do not agree with them as wicked. There are such, and have been more, but fortunately they are few. And it is quite as difficult to find any canon of political expediency. Applied to a particular case, every canon will often fail you. Practically every case has to be decided on its own merits. In other words nothing could be less scientific than practical politics. It is not to be expected then that one could find a criterion by which a form of government could be infallibly tested. It is little to the point that a representative system has worked well in this country in the past or badly in other countries. The question is not whether parliamentary government is good or bad, but whether it is the best possible plan now and here and for us. Therefore, it is much to the point to remind the man who takes parliamentary government for granted as a law of the British polity, that what he is taking for granted is something quite different from what his fathers understood as parliamentary govern-



ment, who also took it for granted. That which totally changes in a generation or so can hardly be a law of any kind. How does every Act of Parliament, not passed under the provisions of the Parliament Act, begin? "Be it enacted by the King's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same." Thus to the making of every ordinary Act there go three essential factors, King, Lords, and Commons, or strictly the King is the prime factor; but the co-operation of the other two cannot be dispensed with. Broadly speaking, an Act of Parliament is the joint product of three parties, and note that a Finance Act, which the Lords have no power to amend or reject, is introduced in precisely the same terms as any other Act. How does this square with fact? In fact as an agent in the making of an Act of Parliament the King no longer counts, the Lords can only hang a bill up for a fixed time, and with a money bill they cannot even do that; the Commons are left as the sole operative party, and their power is mainly an illusion. So that what was once the agreed result of the deliberations of the Sovereign, of an independent order representing property and a long tradition of political experience, and of a popularly elected body, may now be

the work of a single popular chamber, which, in its turn may be representing only a very fleeting popular impulse, or may not be representing the feelings of the country at all. It may even be contradicting it. And this chamber itself has completely changed in its constituents many times, and is certain to change again. In the face of these facts, what is the use of speaking of parliamentary government as though it were a fixed quantity and meant the same thing to our forefathers as it means to us? He who approved of Parliament as it worked a hundred years ago could not support the system we have now. A typical middle-Victorian, to whom Parliament and especially the House of Commons was the glory of the nation and a model for civilisation for all time, could only cry *Ichabod*. Others might think the present plan a better one; and it may be. But it cannot be reasonable to take for granted as a law of the country's being that which has reversed itself and has meant totally different things at different times. Had Parliament changed its name when legislation became the product not of three but of one constituent—Commons in the place of King, Lords and Commons—and shown the change in its new name, there would be vastly less inert acquiescence in its rule than there is now. But it is not our way to change names; we leave the name and charge

it with entirely new matter. This makes revolution easier, for in this way it comes about without most people, who look mainly to names, knowing there has been any revolution. The position of the King in legislation is a good illustration of this. If the diminution of the King's power had been made plain to the public by officially describing him as First Magistrate instead of King, there would have been great ructions, and it is more than possible that he would never have subsided into his present position. But his loyal subjects hear and see that laws are still passed by his most Excellent Majesty, and are quite happy. The Crown, as everyone knows, is the classical case of the splendid fiction of law and constitution. The King is legally entitled to be and do everything that various rhythmic and noble descriptions say he is and does. But in fact he is not anything of these things, and must not do them. Whether he could or can be, and do these things again, is no matter of law, but of force and the will of the Empire. But it is certain that at present, mainly without the knowledge of the country, the politicians have succeeded in reducing the King in legislation to a mere formality which cannot indeed be done without, but which is at the command of other than the King. This was made finally clear when King George V. agreed to make as many new peers as Mr. Asquith

might need to pass the Parliament Bill through the House of Lords. The merits of the bill have nothing to do with the matter. The bill may have been necessary; it may have been good. But that the King should think it his duty, solely because his Minister advised it, to add indefinitely to the number of peers in order that the House of Lords might not be able to reject a bill disabling that House, and so fundamentally altering the constitution of the legislature, a bill, too, on whose rejection no election had turned, was conclusive evidence that, at any rate, in the view of the Crown itself the King personally had lost all power of interfering in matters of legislation. He had become the mere instrument of his Ministers.

In order to avoid the flooding of their Order and House with new creations for whose respectability they had no guarantee, the peers disabled themselves. They preferred to abandon their historic position in the national polity to risking the social purity of their Order. They were willing to take their chance of having measures subversive of all they held necessary to the welfare of their country being passed over their heads, but they would not take their chance of the infusion into their Order of a crowd of undesirables, whom they might not be able to assimilate for many years, and possibly not at all. Those who were entirely

opposed to the Parliament Bill and yet voted for it believed that opposition would only bring upon them both catastrophies, the flood of undesirables and political disability; therefore expediency pointed to a course which, at any rate, would deliver them from one. In this, as in everything else of recent years, the peers showed their want of confidence in themselves. What opposition to the Parliament Bill would in fact have produced no one knows, and is irrelevant here to consider. But the want of belief in themselves which led the peers to accept the bill is very relevant to the good or bad working of parliamentary government. The peers assumed that a determined front would do them no good; would have no effect either on the Government or on the country. People who believed in themselves so little could hardly expect others to believe in them or their cause. And they did not. How indeed could anyone argue with effect that men were fit to retain peculiar legislative power who despaired of fighting for their rights, or of making anyone believe they had any rights? They would not help themselves, and nobody would help them. This is not the temper needed in a body that, as the non-elective factor in legislation, is to co-operate in the country's work, being the complement but not the duplicate of the popular House. It was evident that the peers were not



of the old order which had played so great a part in parliamentary government, and this change in temper seriously modified the whole political position. Whether or not parliamentary government can work successfully without a strong aristocracy, it in fact reached its zenith in this country, as the greatest foreign political thinkers have all pointed out, when the aristocracy was very powerful. And the disappearance of this power must be allowed for in estimating the value of parliamentary government in the future. The House of Lords still has a place in public opinion: it counts as a critical authority, especially at moments when the country is actually dissatisfied with the House of Commons. It has counted during the war. Being mainly an assembly of gentlemen, and having amongst its members many of exceptional ability and experience, and being free, partly through its very impotence, from the disturbing and trivial elements that divert the House of Commons, the Lords in their debates appeal to a serious public and get its respect. But all the time both the Lords themselves and the country are painfully aware that all this good and well-expressed advice is irresponsible. The Lords are not so much as even a sleeping partner either in government or in legislation. They are not so much as the King. A bill cannot become law without the King's signature,

but it can become law without the Lords doing anything. They need not be made even a party to the Act. Soon after the Dublin Insurrection the House of Lords passed, without serious opposition, a vote of censure (in effect whatever it was called) on the Government. The Prime Minister and his colleagues, Conservative as well as Liberal, went on their way as jauntily as though they had received a striking encomium. We all know, of course, that a vote of censure by the House of Lords had long ceased to disturb a Ministry ; but that dated from the time when such a vote meant a Conservative censure on a Liberal Ministry. This, on the other hand, was a both-party censure, undoubtedly representing accurately the feeling of the country, on a both-party Ministry. Therefore, it was not a party move that was ignored, but the House of Lords explicitly as a House. In short, the Lords have gone out.

Most people, no doubt, would say that they must in any case have gone out with the advance of democracy. Be that as it may, the use of them would not have gone, neither did they wait to be squeezed out. As the franchise was extended, so much the more useful to assist the popular chamber would be a non-elective body, if it knew its place, kept its head, and had the courage of its position. Unfortunately, the peers did not so understand their part.

They have stood in the way of others getting the vote instead of insisting on keeping what was theirs. They did not stop the extension of the franchise, but they did allow their own independence to lapse. They became virtually an instrument in the hands of Conservative governments instead of being critical and independent of all governments, irrespective of party. When parties in the Lords were nearly balanced and Ministries stood or fell by their divisions, there was no objection, or no-one felt any, to the Lords acting on party lines ; but when there came to be a permanent majority on one side, the cue, as also the far more excellent part, for the Lords was to take up a generally non-party position, correcting Conservative as well as Radical governments. They could then have justified their status. But they did just the opposite, and, as if conscious of their false position, they gradually abandoned all, adopted resolutions reforming themselves away, and finally consented to their own emasculation.

Here, again it was want of courage. It required courage in Conservative peers to stand up to a Conservative government. Not unnaturally a Conservative leader of the House of Commons, who had been laboriously rolling a heavy bill through the House for many months, was ready enough to put off the House of Lords with a week's discussion of the same bill in



order to get done with Parliament and politics for a season. Every Liberal leader envied him and only wished he could do the same. It would have been very annoying to the Conservative leader had the Lords refused to come into line and insisted on a real examination of the bill, and so have completely upset the time-table. It would have required real moral courage in Conservative peers to do this, especially as most of them would be generally known to, and many of them intimate friends of, the Conservative leader. But if they had had this courage, though their party might have suffered, and some of themselves in their personal careers, their order and their country would have gained. Similar want of courage has prevented the peers from resisting and stopping the continuous introduction into their Order of unfit persons ; men with money, but without manners, intellect, or knowledge ; men with intellect but without money or the knowledge of the world necessary for a peer's part ; and men with no recommendation but their party services or the need to flatter their town or county. This long process of infusion of the unfit has so much modified the peers' Order that the public has lost the respect for it that it has always had for an old family and always will have, and the distinction of the new peers in other ways has not been great enough to prevent or compensate

for this loss of caste. By tending to throw in their lot with rich men outside their Order, the peers have lost much power which they might have had in matters of capital and labour. In British working people there is not, and has never been, any great objection to an aristocrat. By selling their land, their seats, their pictures, and their libraries, the aristocracy have been stripping themselves of ornaments that appeal to the public imagination. These possessions were worthy of a peer's dignity; they could be seen; to a considerable extent the public could enjoy them, and counted the owner a national trustee. Who cares for a duke because he has millions in this or that limited company? What remains of the average peer that has lost his power in Parliament, and shed everything the public can see? He may be an excellent man and have brains, but so may anyone else. Of his peer's position there is nothing left but his title. This still secures social importance, which is a real power. But here, too, the peer's power is being cut into deeply by those whom he has himself patted on the back—new rich men and women who have no object in life but to rise in the social scale. These the peers and peeresses have taken into their houses freely, and as freely have gone into the houses of their protégés. By lavish and insolent expenditure merely rich

folk have bought the social patronage of the peeresses, who are the natural rulers of society. So that even socially the peer does not stand out as he did. The public is able to see that society is a very mixed lot, after all. The general result of all this is that the aristocracy has so shrunk in significance and power that it must be regarded as a small rather than a great factor in the national polity. And this change has a critical bearing on the whole question of parliamentary government.

The shelving of the King and the House of Lords leaves the House of Commons supreme and almost alone as a legislative power, in form at any rate. Formally there is no limit to the power of the Commons. Parliament, as we know, is supreme over constitution and holds the purse strings, and Parliament means the Commons, being the survivor of three partners of whom two have ceased to count. The House of Commons is legally competent to raise the salaries of its members to thousands a year; to give the vote to every man, woman, dog and cat; to establish the Roman Church, and to deprive the Anglican Church and all the Non-conformists of every penny of revenue; to give up a standing army altogether, or introduce conscription in the most stringent form; to make the Judges elective or destroy all the County Councils at a stroke, paying the Justices

vast salaries to take over the work of the Councils. On paper the House of Commons has power hardly so much as claimed by any despot. And all this it could do in the teeth of the public it represents. No doubt it would be called to account when the time came for it to ask another five years of life ; but a House that chose to run amok could not be pulled up legally before it had had time to commit infinite follies. Yet with all this extraordinary and, if temporary, unlimited power, the House of Commons is not a greater but a less important factor in the community than it was. So far back as in 1858 Lord Stanley, son of the 14th Earl of Derby, says in a letter to Disraeli : " Bear in mind that the House of Commons, great as its power may be, is not what it was before the Press reached its present influence." If that was true over fifty years ago, what is to be said now ? The process noted by Lord Stanley had hardly more than begun in his time. Since then, it has been going on without break and without slackening. The House of Commons has ceased to hold the place it once held in the popular imagination, because it has ceased to perform for the people its old functions. At one time political activity or the visible evidences of political activity were practically confined to Parliament, and the country looked to Parliament for its political news, and indeed for all

its political food. The country had practically no touch of the government of the day, except through Parliament. Ministers seldom made important speeches out of Parliament; the idea of speaking direct to the country, dispensing with the House of Commons as intermediary, hardly occurred to them. How is it all changed now! Now, everyone who can read a paper, and everyone does, and if there are any who cannot or do not, they hear its contents from those who do, gets nearly all the political news as quickly as Members of Parliament; sometimes long before the House, as a House, is officially informed. What can show more plainly Ministers' recognition of the declining importance of the House than their thus venturing to give official news to the public before it has been given to the House—news, too, which by etiquette at least the House is entitled to have first? Practically the only pull the Member of Parliament has over the outsider in respect of political news is that he hears what is said in the House a few hours before the outsider can read it. But as the man without has seldom the slightest desire to read what is said within, he does not feel that the M.P. has any great advantage of him; certainly not enough to excite his envy. When a really important speech from an important person is expected in the House, the papers reproduce it so soon after it is spoken



that the public are hardly behind the House in getting it. In this case the public does lose in another way. It has not the great advantage of following the expression and hearing the voice of the speaker, but as very few, almost none, unless he is preparing for a political career, care enough to appreciate nuances of this kind, this privilege of the M.P. is not noticed. It does not enhance the importance of the House in the country. Perhaps an exception must be made of certain folk, familiar enough in the provinces both to candidates and members but hardly known to the general public, who, hanging on the outer ring, like to think themselves politicians, and that they are playing an important part in public life. Sometimes they are "workers," and their enthusiasm is great. To these the House of Commons is still a magic name, and they would give very much indeed to be inside it—in any capacity. These do regard the few hours' advantage M.P.s have over them in hearing debates as a great pull, and they are never so happy as when they get someone who is in the House at the time to describe what happened. For the moment they are themselves Members of Parliament. If they are made to think, as their informant generally takes care they are, that they have been allowed to know something that ought not to be known, or, in fact, is generally not known outside the

House, their satisfaction is complete. They are already, in their own eyes, on the front bench. These busy-bodies, amusing when they do not bore one, are an exception to the growing disregard of Parliament, but they can hardly even prove a rule. On the whole, people find that they do not want the House of Commons ; they can do without it ; they do not look to it for news, and the big men in politics speak to them direct in public meetings more and more frequently. The great efforts are reserved for the platform, and the platform gains at the cost of Parliament. Peers and great commoners alike use the platform now ; there is no need to trouble to get into any of the strangers' galleries to see and hear any public man. If the working man and the shopkeeper feel this, how much more the highly-educated man of the same class as the M.P. What need can there be for him to trouble himself much about what goes on in the House ? He loses the peculiar "atmosphere" no doubt, but unless he thinks of standing himself, that atmosphere he probably is more than content to avoid. He can do his thinking for himself—whether he does or not—and when he does read a debate seldom feels he has got much from it. The Press, noting these signs of the times, has given impetus to the whole process by its method of reporting and commenting. Seeing that the public ap-



petite for politics generally, and especially for parliamentary debates, is getting less and less keen, editors, or more correctly proprietors, have been steadily cutting down the space they give to these things until they bulk so small in the papers that the reader, taking them at their face value, thinks little of them. In this as always, the Press takes its lead from the public and gives great impetus to a process already in motion. The educated man is affected in another way to the same result. He does not think parliamentary matter unimportant because it occupies little space, but generally he finds, when he does want to read what someone said in the House, that it has been reduced to a few lines at the reporter and sub-editor's discretion. So he cannot tell what was really said, and is not at all sure that the gist will be correctly given in the few lines before him. So he throws the paper on one side and is still more put off reading speeches, except of the very big guns, who are reported fully. To him the descriptive accounts of sittings in the House are worse than useless. They give him exactly what he does not want. He does sometimes want to know what was said in debate, but he does not care in the least about all the side issues, personal touches, and "business" generally that delight "our parliamentary correspondent." Everything tends to "put off"

the educated man who is not in politics and does not want to be. The assumption of the modern newspaper seems to be that its readers are divided into two classes : those who either are or want to be Members of Parliament, and those who do not want to be ; and that the former class must want to know everything that happens in Parliament, except what is said, and the latter will want to know nothing about it all. The non-politician is humoured by the little space given to politics and the politician by the meticulous detail of what is given. Both ways it shows the newspaper manager's consciousness of the small hold Parliament has on the general public.

But there are internal causes for the decline in the importance of the House of Commons as far-reaching as any without. These are the ever-increasing stringency of the party machine, and the absolute supremacy of the government of the day. Meantime, it is worth noting that the House has no real entity as a house at all, except in so far as it has an "atmosphere" which members cherish as the breath of the nation, and nobody else cares one straw about. The House of Commons does almost nothing as a House ; as something other than a legislative body (few men would now like to call it their club) it may have a sort of collective existence. The House is now a stage or a storey in the great edifice of political party.

The party business, wherever it begins, runs right through the country and merely takes the House of Commons on its way. It runs vertically through the House up to other things. The House is but an episode in the story, hardly more than an accident. The fight between two, or more, parties goes on inside exactly as outside; there is no transformation when the scene is transferred to Parliament; everything is done by one party or the other, or with a view to one or the other; the so-called House is practically always divided and always divided against itself, and, therefore, as a House it falls. There is this party and there is that party, but politically there is no House. "Nor never was!" Maybe, but that does not make it any more of a House now. It is, of course, perfectly true that the House has always been sharply divided; for two centuries regular parties have absorbed it in their secular contest, but perhaps not utterly as now. In times past parties have sometimes got together and the House has acted as a whole in defiance of Government or Opposition whips. The present non-party aspect of the House of Commons, arising out of the war truce, is not a case in point. It is for one thing a temporary accident, which Mr. Asquith, speaking after his retirement, confidently predicted would not last. He looked forward to the House relapsing into its old

party ways. The House as an entity is no more now than it was before the war. It has had no part in bringing about the party truce. That truce was made by the leaders of the various parties and has obtained in the House simply as it has obtained in the country. It is true that once or twice there has been a general rising against the Government, which has had to give way. But that was possible precisely because there was a truce between parties and a government representing both of them. Neither party gave away anything to the other in standing up to the Government. It was no independent action on the part of the House, but both parties by rebelling simultaneously against their chiefs in the Cabinet left matters as between them easy. The significant thing about the present coalition House of Commons is that though it has been perfectly safe from a party point of view for members to take a line independent of the Government they have so seldom had the courage to do so. Yet they have felt that the Government were remiss and lagging behind the country and knew that their constituents would applaud independent action, spurring the Ministry to greater energy. Let them have all credit due to them for shrinking from putting difficulties in the Government's way, but, having given the Government a fair trial, and having left them free of criticism

for many months after the war began, and knowing that much was going wrong, the unofficial members of the House might reasonably be expected to use the advantage of their present peculiar position and show more independence, to the great advantage of the country. As it is, though we have for once an apparently non-party House, the House of Commons has never counted for less in the country's regard than it does now. The House of Lords has counted proportionately more. Neither has the substitution of a small Cabinet of action for Mr. Asquith's thoroughly parliamentary Government—a substitution due in no way to the House—affected that position.

Probably the greatest political change that has come over the House of Commons is its complete overshadowing, which is a very mild term to describe the phenomenon, by the Government of the day. Naturally this has been observed and dwelt on by many, though practical politicians rather avoid the subject. It is not a pleasant truth to tell the House, and every politician feels that he may one day be a Minister. This overwhelming position of the Government has been brought about by the development of the party machine, and by the closure in its successive and cumulative stages. The effectiveness of the party machine enables the Government practically to dispose of its own



men as pawns. A Cabinet measure can always be forced on the majority by the intimation that if the bill is not carried the Government will resign. Any member that voted against his own Government on a life and death division of that kind would certainly not again be adopted as candidate by his constituents. The voters have been too well "educated" by the machine for that. And all sorts of other unpleasant consequences will fall on the unhappy member. It practically comes to this: he must either give up his political career or go over to the other side. On divisions that are not crucial for the Government he may vote against his party occasionally without fatal but not without distinctly unpleasant results. The Whips will keep a severe eye upon him; he will hardly be persona grata to his party or his chiefs. In such circumstances it is obvious that the Government can control its own men as it will, except the comparatively few who do not wish to come back to the House after the next election. From time to time, no doubt, a strong and prominent man of Cabinet rank may break away without such dire results, but, however strong and popular he may be, he will find his public life thereafter no bed of roses. In fact, he is, as a rule, politically sterilised. Then the Government can keep down the Opposition by means of the closure. Party discipline is so good that a Government with



even a small majority can in these days make pretty sure of outvoting its opponents whenever it is desired. The only effective weapons left to an Opposition were criticism and obstruction, and the closure has deprived them of both. Freedom of debate and of criticism has gone when it is in the power of the Government to cut off debate whenever it likes. Ministers may not be tyrannical; they may use the power of the closure reasonably; none the less the whole spirit of debate must be changed. Whether the closure works on the whole ill or well, it necessarily leaves Ministers masters of the House as it was intended to do. The closure was a Government proposal; it was not the proposal of the House, which has never done anything to save itself from the ruin the closure was certain to bring upon it. This result has been greatly facilitated by the invention of the "Kangaroo" closure, which enables the Chairman of Committee, who is not on the Speaker's serene non-party plane, to jump over any number of amendments and select for discussion only those he thinks important. By this means amendments go undiscussed in batches. It is in committee stage, when details are considered, that an Opposition has a chance of making itself felt—therefore this form of closure hits an Opposition especially hard. Yet more drastic is the "Guillo-

tine"—an effective or oppressive instrument, according to the point of view, which the non-political public knows very little about. How many people realise that it is in the power of the Government, by a mere resolution, which it can always carry, to pass any number of sections of a bill without any discussion at all—not with abridged or brief discussion, but with no discussion at all? And this instrument is used not infrequently by either party when in office.

So that free parliamentary government, legislation by Kings, Lords and Commons, in the long run means the absolute power of the Government of the day. King and Lords have had to stand aside, and the Government have acquired complete control of the House of Commons. The change to an executive not responsible to Parliament would not be such a violent revolution after all! It is plain that nothing can control or ultimately check the Government but the appeal to the country—a general election. So it is not strange that one hears it suggested that the House might very well be done without. Once a Government is elected (it is in effect elected though not in form), it must run its course until next election.

This is an exaggeration, but it is a very natural view. Although it can get its way in the House

in the end, the Government has to manage a body of over six hundred men, and this managing means a vast amount of worry and thought. Humouring, tact and diplomacy have to come into play. The bludgeon is always there and can be used if necessary ; but it does not look well to bring it out too often. Neither is it required very often, for the House knows it is in the Government's grip, struggle as it may ; therefore, for the most part, it does not struggle. It quietly takes its line from its master. Private Members' Bills have become little more than tactical moves, being introduced either to impress constituents or to worry the Government. They are not expected or even meant to pass. At any rate, they hardly ever do. Initiative rests with the Government ; Opposition leaders have some say in the business, but beyond the two front benches there is no initiative at all. Little in fact is demanded of the ordinary member beyond that he shall always be there and always vote straight. This is the burden of the private members' complaint, which we have all heard over and over again. He has not a chance : the front benches have the whole game in their hands ; he is reduced to an item. There are still useful activities open to the private member, such as service on private bill committees, and he has a better chance in grand committees than in the Chamber.

Then to some of them the small play of party, which they can still indulge in, seems to be infinitely diverting, but there is no doubt that many of them and some of the best find it all very unprofitable. The hope of one day getting to the front bench themselves keeps a good many in the House while others stay out of habit.

The truth is the House of Commons does not impress the outsider very greatly now. The tall phrases formerly in use: "the grand inquest of the nation," loved by Sir William Harcourt, Bulwer's "sublime arena," seem ridiculous to us. It is difficult not to be impatient of the mid-Victorian enthusiasm for Parliament and for the House of Commons in particular. Take the account (cited in Mr. Buckle's fourth volume of the life of Disraeli) of the Commons debate on Lord Ellenborough's despatch to Lord Canning, Viceroy of India, on the Oude proclamation, an account gathered from contemporaries, mainly from Disraeli himself. The note of tense excitement, the nervousness, the universal flutter! One can imagine the club confabs, the drawing-room whisperings, the running to and fro of great ladies and little men, the button-holing in the streets, the bets and books on the result, all society in an almost uncontrollable agony of suspense. It all seems very curious to us in these days. How could

people take party politics so seriously? For it was the party and personal side of the business that was taken seriously. The accounts make it perfectly clear—without intending it—that the question of Indian administration was important far less for its own profound significance than because it might bring about a change of Ministers. Who would win the bout in the game? That was the interesting question; that was what was spoiling the sleep of the Great World; and, what is so strange to us, was really moving the outside public. At that time people were still simple enough to believe that it made a great difference in the government of the country whether one dozen of politicians or another like them sat on the Speaker's right. Something comes of it, of course, but that it usually makes any real difference in the general conduct of the affairs of the country whether one party or the other is in office is hard to pretend off the platform. Both parties do it pretty well or pretty badly, according to the point of view. Certainly the non-politician to-day does not expect one party to do much better than another and therefore is quite incapable of the political excitement of the good mid-Victorians. Not that this holds in political circles; or it did not before the war. The ordinary member, or the candidate, and his clientèle is still full of the national importance



of his mission and the significance of the House and its ways. This strikes the stranger in the House at once. The famous "atmosphere," which is undoubtedly there, seems to him just a general fussy importance, much energy about almost nothing, amazing interest in petty trifling. The whole seems unreal, and it is difficult to believe that these gentlemen are governing the British Empire. This, he is told, is because he is not inside: he does not know the House. But there are those who have been in the House and done their time there who think much the same. Is the stranger so far off the mark after all in thinking the House unreal? Here are 670 men got together with infinite pains and at great expense to deliberate on behalf of the nation on the affairs of State. Yet it is common knowledge that argument in the House has no relation to votes given there; no one expects anything he says to affect a single other member's views or vote, just as he knows his own vote will be given entirely irrespective of what he or anybody else may say. This is debate and deliberation!

These gentlemen are here in the High Court of Parliament to do their best to promote the good government of their country, and they do this by promptly ranging themselves on two opposite sides, like the teams in a football match. By the rules of the game one side is



to govern the country and the other is to do its best to prevent them. Very interesting to the players, no doubt, and amusing to on-lookers, were the stakes something less high than the British Empire. But it is just this ceaseless tug, the perpetual scrimmage of one party trying to thwart the other, that is the real business and interest of the House. And having discovered this, the stranger begins to understand things. He begins to understand why what seem big things to him do not interest his M.P. friend, and what he thinks mere trifles interest the M.P. consumedly. Foreign affairs and the Indian Budget leave the House cold and sparsely attended; a change in their own procedure—the Rules of the Game—a personal statement or members' salaries draw a full house immediately. He can hardly get his parliamentary friends to discuss foreign affairs at all—they are impatient to get to other things. Do they not know anything about foreign affairs, or do they not care? It soon comes out that “the game never turns on foreign affairs now.” (It has been different, of course since the war). And so throughout. Most of the speeches and most of the questions made and put from either side have really in view not the ostensible subject, but an opportunity to embarrass the other side. There is nearly always something behind the question.

A stranger to the House cannot help noticing what a passion political intrigue becomes to members; perhaps intrigue is too serious a word; it is the chicane of the game which fascinates them. See a knot of two or three members talking together, it is ten to one they are discussing some parliamentary trick. Excited, head to head, their whole being concentrated on the matter, they are whispering mysteriously about a projected "snap" division. The idea is by adroit manœuvring to get a large hidden force of their own men mobilised for rapid entry into the Chamber when very few of the other side are present; then precipitate a division and put the Government in a minority. It is of no account what is the matter before the House, nor that the Government will take no notice of the division. It will be gravely argued that they ought to abide by the division, though a division is significant only as representing the view of the House, which is precisely what the division in question does not do and is not meant to do, or it would not be "snap." And these are not children but men! The secret of the fascination of this play is no doubt the personal side. Men who meet day after day for months find one another's idiosyncrasies and political fortunes even more interesting than boring, just as gossips find their neighbours. To score off

one another is a huge delight. Insensibly the House of Commons becomes to most members the world, and many of them have no other world. They see everything through not a rarified but a distorting atmosphere. To them things are not as they are: everything takes a political hue; and out of the House they often see with difficulty as animals out of their proper element. This partly explains the common want of touch between constituents and members and the general unpopularity of elective representative bodies. Constituents find the man they have sent up changed from what they knew him and he has seldom done what they expected him to do, and what he said he would do. Personally, there seems no reason to think the House has seriously degenerated in intellect or character, though it has greatly changed socially. There are many fewer country gentlemen, who are perhaps less exposed than most members to temptation of personal ambition or other gain: but with that exception probably much the same motives prompt members now as prompted them a hundred or fifty years ago. In this aspect the House of Commons has been so well—one might say finally—summed up by Mr. Arthur A. Baumann, who was in the House for some years and has never ceased closely to observe political circles, in his "Persons

and Politics of the Transition," that it would be idle to attempt to do it afresh here.

"Let us consider," he says, "what are the chief temptations which lead a man into political dishonesty, or, if that be thought too hard an expression, which induce him to entrust his political conscience to the keeping of party Whips. They are desirous of political office, of professional gain, and of social advantage. In the House of Commons the number who desire and think themselves fit for political office is very much larger than an outsider would imagine. It certainly amounts to a hundred men on each side, and that is nearly a third of the House. Then there are the lawyers, who, for some inscrutable reason are the only class allowed without reproach to combine the pursuit of professional promotion with the public service. The number of barristers who enter the House of Commons with the avowed object of getting on the bench strikes one in the eye. Then there are the city men, directors and promoters of companies, who find that the letters M.P. increase their fees; to whom must be added a small number of "literary gents," who find that the same affix increases the market value of their pens. Lastly comes the large intermediate class of those who seek in one or other of the political parties social advantage, or amusement for themselves or

their womankind, whether in the shape of receptions, dinners, Palace invitations, ribands, baronetcies, or peerages. Add up all these selfish or sinister interests in the House of Commons, substract them from the total, and what remains! The residue of disinterested patriots in whose ears the whip cracks unheeded, who have spent their money and their time to get elected from sheer love of public duty, is painfully small."

This is how the House appears to very many observers—outside observers, no doubt—but most of us are not very good at seeing ourselves as others see us, or at seeing ourselves as we are; therefore, it is quite possible that outsiders may be as good judges of the House as the House is of itself. Obviously there must be many domestic points about the House that only experienced members can rightly appreciate or even be aware of. On the other hand this finesse in House of Commons refinements may actually make it more difficult for Members of Parliament to see their House in its broader aspects. Some of those who have been in Parliament and afterwards have withdrawn from parliamentary life have been heard to say the same. Also, be it noted, there are men now in the House, and not the least intelligent, who would generally endorse all that is said here. Naturally these would not



be many. It is human to wish to magnify one's vocation, especially when it has cost much money, much talking, and much energy to enter it. A certain sense of loyalty, too, deters members from detached criticism of their own House.

Need we even regret the complete domination the Government of the day has acquired over the Commons? (Probably, it is fair to note, this domination has greatly contributed to make the House just what it is.) Given a Ministry with a free hand, being a comparatively small number of able men, strong government should be guaranteed. Certainly Mr. Asquith's Coalition Government, to which there was no regular opposition to be suppressed, had as good a chance as any autocracy or any executive not responsible to Parliament. Yet we did not get strong government under it, nor far-seeing government. This may seem rather a sweeping judgment, but it is at least not partizan. Just about half the country has thought this of every government we have had, and in secret generally much more than half, and of the Coalition Government there is really no doubt that practically the whole country thought it. It was the sober view of the non-political man, that is, a man not personally concerned with party politics; and he was probably on the whole right.



Where was the weak point? This involves the question, asked by many keen minds, both men of action and political writers—where is the real seat of power? We have seen that it is not in Parliament—apparently it should be in the Ministry. But even under present conditions the parliamentary system in many ways diminishes from and hampers the power of the Government. The Prime Minister is wholly unable to disregard the party machine though he may be its driver. For the sake of its own future life, a Ministry cannot dismiss the thought of an election. Is then the real power with the country? The country can choose between two parties; it can do no more. It was profoundly dissatisfied with Mr. Asquith's both-party Ministry, and was helpless. It was in front of the Government all through, and had to chafe inpotently while Ministers went through the process of in turn ignoring that which was wanted, declaring it was not wanted, then proclaiming it vital, and ultimately doing it. Here we can trace an indirect power in the country to get something done in the end; but necessarily the general public can never have administrative power and only very indirect influence on legislation. This influence is all the time modified and generally twisted out of truth by party necessity. The conclusion is that in this country power is not

concentrated anywhere ; every depository of power which seems to be final is balanced, or, if not balanced, it is checked by power elsewhere, though never by the ostensible and deliberate checks provided by the constitution.

Some, no doubt, will see in this our great political glory—an even distribution of power. In fact it is haphazard rather than even ; scattered rather than well distributed. It may make tyranny impossible, but it also makes strong government impossible. It might savour more of epigram than of accuracy to say that the present state of things gives us the drawbacks without the advantages both of popular and absolute government, but there would be a good deal of truth in the remark.

No Ministry can afford to be much above or ahead of its own followers ; it must take as its norm, first, the standard of the average Member of Parliament supporting it ; second, the average friendly elector in the country ; third, the average man. Therefore the best thing to do or the best way of doing it is never attempted. Further, those who have to play up to a certain level of opinion and taste tend to play below it. This is conspicuous in the Press and on the stage ; and it holds in politics. Modern governments may seem to show but little tenderness for the conscience or feelings of their followers in Parliament, but the Government proposal

before the House has always taken stock of their general standard. Ministers have satisfied themselves that their friends will swallow the dose. Therefore they can afford to administer it summarily, but this rough treatment is not a proof of independence.

Also, Ministers have always to be thinking of the ultimate effect on the electorate. What will please the largest number from whom support may be hoped for? The outcome of this habit of mind is to postpone the ordinary and necessary work of the country to special and controversial matters. Except when peace or war is obviously in issue, it is difficult to get the average Briton to take interest in foreign affairs or in the Army. In the Navy he does take interest, and would be willing—governments notwithstanding—to spend indefinitely upon it, but the Navy is necessarily a highly expert subject, and beyond wishing it to be as powerful as possible, the average elector rightly takes naval matters for granted. They are not often for him matters of controversy. Hence governments tend to subordinate foreign affairs, Army and Navy to infinitely less important matters of more controversial interest at the moment. It is credibly reported that members of Mr. Asquith's Government upon the murder of the Archduke expressed great surprise when it was put to them that

the tension between Austria and Servia might lead to grave consequences. They were so much preoccupied with domestic differences of acuter political interest that they had hardly thought about the European situation at all.

In British Cabinets (the present quite exceptional and parenthetical arrangement apart) foreign, military and naval policy is not dealt with by experts nor treated as a business. It comes as part of the general political process—that is to say—getting into office and keeping there. Admiralty and War Office fall to this man or that not because of any fitness in him for the job any more than any other department is given to a man because he is fit for it. It is all politics. About the Foreign Office there is a certain selection. Not every successful politician can count on the Foreign Office coming to him in his turn. None the less general political exigencies determine the choice even of Foreign Secretary more than consideration of fitness. Otherwise, it would be hard to account for the selection of a man who spoke no foreign language and could not even read French with ease. However, general character and calibre is more important than expert training, as everything English happily recognises, and while one might think it was possible to combine the two more often than seems to be done, the serious thing about our present

parliamentary plan is not so much that untrained men are put over these departments as that it inevitably relegates Foreign Affairs, Navy and Army to a second place in the mind of the Government.

Another defect of the present system is its elimination of the soldier-statesman or the sailor-statesman, still more of the soldier-and-sailor statesman. We are accustomed to take for granted that the functions of soldiers, sailors, and statesmen are distinct and cannot be united in the same person. Historic precedent does not bear out this conception. It may be sound as applied to subordinates; modern naval and military science is so expert that it may be impossible for more than a few in the services to have thought for anything else, but to carry this view right through to the top is to subdivide counsel to an extent that can hardly fail to tell injuriously on unity of plan and concentration in its execution. How can he correctly gauge a scheme who has no understanding of the instruments by which it will have to be carried out? Can he who had nothing to do with making the scheme, and knows it only in part, carry it out so intelligently as one in whose mind it was from the beginning? It seems hardly disputable that it would make for success if the main thread of statesmanship and naval and military plans were in the same



mind. This may be impossible, but need we be as far from such an idea as we are now ?

It is unfortunate, too, that it is the better element that is now crowded out. The soldier or the sailor has no chance in the parliamentary game with the politician ; with the result that the best type of sailor and soldier gives politics a very wide berth. Lord Kitchener was no exception to this rule, in spite of appearances ; and General Lyautey, one of the greatest of living Frenchmen, soon found political life impossible.

On the whole, probably nothing handicaps our public men in dealing with a great situation of action, compared with statesmen not responsible to a Parliament, so much as their public training and environment. The direct and necessary result of our parliamentary system is to make our very finest young men—exclusive of the happily large number who go into the Services—look to speaking as the great thing in life. And so indeed it is from the point of view of the candidate for public distinction. No man can go far in political life unless he can speak easily ; nothing is out of the reach of the man who can draw and hold a large popular audience. The successful speaker, though he be a fool, may make a very considerable success in political life : the capable man of action who cannot speak has no chance. It is true



a man cannot get to the top who has not brain to help a glib tongue ; but his brain will hardly help him without the glib tongue. No doubt this will bring to mind one striking exception. But would Mr. Balfour's intellect have compensated for deficiency in mere fluency, had not adventitious circumstances thrust him in the front rank early in his career ?

It cannot be gainsaid that British public men are brought up on talk. " Words, words, words " are their currency, not acts. This tends to falsify their whole view of men and things, and puts them out of sympathy with some of the best elements in the nation ; especially it unfits them for crises when it is necessary to act at once without talking. Mr. Asquith and his colleagues had been brought up in this school (though one or two of them have also had a fine training in action out of England) and their general attitude to this unparalleled time agreed therewith. They had been accustomed to look at things from a parliamentary point of view, and it was difficult for them to see the war in any other light. In all their conduct of affairs one saw the parliamentary hand. To fence with questions and put a good face on things in the House seemed to be the main object. Small blame to them. How could they change their skin ? It is the way all through. In ordinary times every Minister is

much more concerned with the presentation of his case to Parliament than with the case itself. For the most part a subject is important to him in proportion as it bulks large or small in the House of Commons. Civil servants can testify to this. The diversion of their thought and time from their proper work to the preparation of material for parliamentary fence is a great scandal; but how many know anything about it? Leaders out of office cannot bring it up against Ministers, for, when their turn comes, which they are all earnestly expecting, they will themselves want to use the civil servants precisely in the same way. And if any other witness is needed, the biographies and private correspondence of great public men provide it.

Words which are rightly a means become an end, and Parliament that was meant to be an instrument of the nation becomes its own object.

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## CHAPTER III

### PARTY

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EVERYONE admits that parliamentary government can not work without parties. Yet everyone decries party and deplores the strength of the party system. It is amusing (and a very common thing) to hear a man in the same sentence gaily belauding parliamentary government, admitting that it can work only by means of party, and damning party and party spirit as the curse of the country. He will do this apparently without a suspicion that there is a screw loose in his political position or any sort of weakness in his logic. The happy soul is perfectly content to deceive himself. If asked whether he does not think it rather strange that an ideal institution such as Parliament should be able to do nothing without the help of a corrupt influence such as party, the point, it appears, has not occurred to him. When he has waxed eloquent on platforms about the golden age "when none was for a party but all were for the State"

he fully thought he was preaching the parliamentary ideal. Yet it is very certain that in any State where none is for a party none will be in a Parliament.

Party is not a parasite on Parliament or a dependent. It is true it flourishes most luxuriantly where parliamentary government obtains, but Parliament lives on party at least as much as party on Parliament. Each is useful to the other: neither can afford to lecture or despise the other.

Further, it is always said that our delicate constitution can work only when there is substantial, though tacit, agreement between parties on fundamental questions—the things that matter. If there is real and vital disagreement on these, the country is rent and civil war shows above the horizon. On the other hand, if there is not this real difference between parties, what is all the hullabaloo about? All the sound and fury of an election is a sham? Of course it is, the politician will say, in your sense but not in mine. It will seldom matter very much to the country whether I or the other fellow be elected: but it will matter a great deal to me. Just as it will make all the difference to Ministers which party gets in, though a few months after the election the public will be saying that the change of Government has changed little else (more

probably it will say "nothing else,") and will be crying in disgust "A plague on both their houses." Honest candidates, of which there are quite a good many, feel the falsity of their position from this point of view much more than most people would think. They cannot win an election without a prodigious amount of labour, talk, dust and noise; they must thump tubs; they must kiss babies; they must be tremendously in earnest; they must persuade themselves (until they believe it) that there never was so important a contest as theirs. Naturally as intelligent men, not mountebanks, they wish to think that all this business and clatter is about something extremely important; something national and not personal; something that will make the world move. This wish fathers thought until by the arrival of polling day candidates often are worked up to the desired condition and do honestly believe that their election will make a real difference to the whole Empire. The cooling down and humiliating process comes later. The dust clears and the candidates begin to see what they really fought each other for. Sometimes, it is true, the issues of an election are national and the differences between parties of Imperial significance. Then the honest candidate is quite happy and endures no after-math of self-contempt; but it means that

the country is in very serious danger. His happiness is the country's sorrow.

It is almost curious how entirely the public which is not actively engaged in politics declines to adopt the candidate's point of view. The ordinary citizen does not in the least see the contest as one between "causes;" the fervent appeals to him to support this candidate or the other on patriotic grounds leave him quite cold. If he takes any notice, which usually he does not, he smiles. The canvasser is everywhere a stock if mild joke. By common consent he is everybody's legitimate butt. Anyone who has done any canvassing must be familiar with the half-sarcastic, half-suspicious smile that receives him. Ask a clerk for his principal and state your business to be the desire to see him on behalf of Mr.—the parliamentary candidate, and you will be received much as a shabby man that would borrow money or a person coming with an unlikely story. The clerical youth feels his advantage in a moment and, pleased at his unwonted position of superiority, deigns to tell you that he will take in your name but doubts if the principal will see you. Political circles cannot realise how small a ripple in the pool of life is made by a general election. The keen candidate, who secretly suspects it, deplores this apathy and thinks his constituents



or desired constituents mainly slack and stupid. And it is quite true that a great many of them are wholly ignorant of political matters and a larger number wholly indifferent. But the majority are probably neither so slack nor so stupid as the candidate thinks, but take a juster measure of the whole business than he. They have seen with their eyes and come to their own conclusions. They see no reason for any great excitement on their part, though they can quite understand his. If they were candidates, they would be excited too. They are not unpatriotic at all. Let there be any question affecting His Majesty or the Royal Family; any question of war; any issue in which obviously the country and not a party is at stake, and these uninterested folk catch fire and blaze better than the Government or politicians. In short the political apathy of the public is partly ignorance and partly knowledge; and perhaps more knowledge than ignorance.

The large percentage of the electorate that goes to the poll may seem to show that the public is not apathetic. But this is an illusion. Stop the working of the party machines for a few years and leave the electors to look after themselves at elections, and then see how many of them go to the poll. Most men regard themselves as belonging to

a party though the tie troubles them but little, and if pressure is put on and everything is done to make it easy for them to vote, they will vote. It is almost less bother to go to the poll than to stay away. In these days of perfected party machinery the elector is never lost sight of by his party. The principal agent (whatever he may happen to be styled), the big man at the top somewhere in Whitehall or thereabouts, is in touch with all the army of local agents. These keep their eyes on all the electors known to belong to their party; they know their movements and watch them ceaselessly. They do, that is, if they are efficient agents and know their job. Every voter friendly or hostile is seen at certain intervals by a canvasser; so that the agent, in a sense, has his eye on every elector, and his hand as well as his eye on every friendly elector. On the approach of an election the entire electorate is canvassed afresh, and the agent is put in perfect touch with the very latest disposition of the voter. He knows the forces he can count on and takes his steps to put them in motion. Every elector gets a card telling him where to vote and precisely how to vote (not to mention the advice as to whom he should vote for) giving him his number on the register. The voter has only to put one of these cards in his pocket and voting becomes as easy as A.B.C. If it

is too much trouble to him to walk to the polling place, he will be called for by the candidate's friends and taken there in a carriage. On the polling day someone from the candidate will call on him betimes and inquire after his vote. If he has not voted, another call will be paid him. In well-organised committee rooms this process of looking up electors goes on with quiet persistence until by the end of the day a very small proportion of "friendlies" remain unaccounted for. In these circumstances is it strange that a large percentage of the electorate go to the poll? Can any inference of concern in the election or political keenness be drawn from the fact that a large percentage do? How many go to the poll simply owing to the importunity of the local party machine, who can say?

It is very difficult for a candidate or a Member of Parliament to gauge the real disposition of the population in his constituency because he is necessarily always surrounded by a keen minority. Do what he may to get at the truth, these are the people he will see the most of, and it is only natural, almost inevitable, that he should think them a truer sample of the whole population than they are. All the more so that these keen people make the same mistake about themselves. The agent, it is true, is a paid professional; it is all just day to day

business with him. He can take all the hubbub with the stolidity of a "pro"; he need not be excited or get his head turned or suffer any of the maladies attendant on enthusiasm. He will earn his bread the more worthily by regarding elections and "causes" alike as just coming in the day's work. Thus he will be the better agent and do his master best service. But it is difficult even for the oldest agent to keep himself entirely superior to the excitement all around him. Naturally it is the energetic and keen man who is the most likely to suffer from the contagion of enthusiasm. Detachment of mind and great energy are not often combined in the same person. But both are wanted in a political agent. He is nearly always a steadying force, but not enough so to keep the candidate straight in his view of the real mind of the people. The candidate may be so fortunate as to have for his chairman, or confidential political friend in the constituency, a man of knowledge and broad judgment, a man himself fully up to House of Commons form, who is interested in politics, but for some reason cannot or does not care himself to stand. Such a local friend will be the greatest blessing a candidate can have. But such friends are rare; if for no other reason, because men of that calibre usually will not trouble to concern themselves in local politics. They are put off

by the pettiness of it all. It is not possible to deny that local political "leaders" and the workers and helpers generally are busy-bodies (for the most part amiable busy-bodies no doubt), who like to think they are doing important public work. Their fussy enthusiasm is certainly amusing when it does not irritate. It flatters these gentlemen to flutter round the candidate. It gives them, certainly in their own eyes and perhaps in the eyes of some others, a certain local importance: and it may be really useful to them, if they want to have a place on municipal bodies. The more youthful local politicians are often honest, and in a sense more or less pathetic, victims of an illusion that they are serving their country. They are aspirants to fame, and full of enthusiasm for their side. Then there is the out-and-out party man: he is a familiar figure in local political circles. We all know the man who likes to take a firm stand on the hearth rug and, bending backward, both hands plunged deep in his pockets, tell you fiercely that he is an "out-and-out party man." There is seldom any desire to take up the challenge, for it is difficult to conceive him anything else than a mere party man. However, this sort always seems to think it something of a distinction to be a great partisan and is proud of the title. The candidate must cultivate him, of course, for to him he is



obviously useful; just as the same type in Parliament is useful to his leader and very pleasing to the Whips.

This is the candidate's entourage, and it is very unrepresentative of the mass. In a provincial town of moderate size the agent is pretty widely known; he is a local somebody as is the Chairman of the Association and others among the active politicians. In a large town, unless otherwise of weight, these count for less; and in London they do not count at all. In a Metropolitan division hardly anyone has ever heard of the agent or of the magnates of the local Association; and if he did hear of them, their names could signify nothing to him. They are a tiny coterie to themselves. In rural districts the local politicians are probably pretty well known; for there anyone of local prominence is, if possible, pressed into service. But the agricultural labourer marks them very little. On the whole, the local politician of the county division is a superior type to the provincial town magnate, who, in his turn, is superior to the local politicians of a London division. Generally the local political Association and the circle of which it is the centre have no influence at all on the political views of electors. They have much more influence on candidates than on the people. The candidate often hesitates to take a strong course which



he feels to be wise for fear of offending or hurting the feelings of someone prominent on his Association. He fears domestic difference, and is worried about possible jealousies in this quarter or that. He seldom dares to speak over the heads of the coterie to the people who are going to elect or reject him; which is unfortunate, for it tends to enfeeble his position and even his character as a public man; and narrows his outlook. It is natural, of course, that he should pay attention to the agent, the professional electioneer. A man new to politics or even to the locality can hardly help being very much in the agent's hands; and it takes a good deal of strength to stand up against him, even in an old hand who knows the political game and the constituency. The agent necessarily looks at things from one point of view only—getting in his man. He really has nothing to do with the policy or views, save in so far as they may affect his candidate's chances. Inevitably the agent is against any view or any course that he thinks risky, that may alienate a man here or there, that may not be popular. He is for the safe game. He shakes his head at anything original in the candidate's politics, any point of view unusual in men of his party, even an unwonted way of putting a commonplace notion. He wants his man to go on the well-worn lines familiar to the party. Probably,

from the agent's point of view—electioneering pure and simple, or more probably simple without being pure—he is right. Anything exceptional is likely to shock the average man and to put him off. As for the candidate he can hardly help coming into line. All this surely turns out the Member of Parliament according to stereotyped pattern, and makes him run in a dreary groove. It depresses the tone of public men and of Parliament.

But what is the aspiring Parliamentarian to do? How is he to escape the treadmill? He starts, we will say, with many ideas, with strong convictions, with a sincere wish to put his ideas into action, believing they will make for the good of the country and the happiness of the people. "If I am to do anything," he says, "I must first get into Parliament." (This may be his fundamental error: but as he is a candidate, that is obviously what he will think). "It is no use my expounding magnificent views and great plans, if I cannot get into a position to carry them out. To do that I must get into Parliament, and I cannot do that unless I win this election. The first thing obviously is to win the election." His agent and most of his friends, nervous of his reputation for ideas, are always urging upon him the same. "You cannot afford to risk anything now; first, win the election."

The agent's point of view predominates from the beginning. In the original choice of candidates wealth, local influence, and claims on the party, which means the return due either for large contributions to the party chest or for special services done at the Whips' request, count for much more than ability, education, manners, or birth. Not so much from sordidness in the forces that make the choice as in the deliberate calculation that these are the things that most help a candidate to win. If in addition to wealth and local influence a man have brains, birth and manners, no doubt it is all the better. But to be known, or to be thought, to have ideas will not help him; it will more likely stand in his way.

The candidate soon discovers for himself that it is not politics that win elections. He begins, perhaps, full of the great questions of the day. He is keenly interested in foreign politics and imperial questions. His agent soon damps him down. The people, he says, don't care about those things; (in fact they care more about them than agents and such like imagine). Talk to working men about wages; to middle-class men about taxes and property; and, if you can, always bring in something local. Don't be afraid of abusing the other side roundly; hot and strong is what the people like.

In other words, he is to avoid big questions ; to talk cheap clap-trap loudly, and, so far as he can, make the election of a Member of an Imperial Parliament—a Parliament which is to take charge of world-wide interests—turn on local issues. He is inclined to rebel, but is pulled up with the thought that, after all, the only thing now is to win the election. This is only a means to an end. If he can only get in, he will mind the big things later. He is told he must not, at any cost, put forward some proposal he is keen on : “fatal in this constituency.” He is asked to support another which he dislikes ; he declines. “At any rate, don’t openly oppose it. Say nothing about it,” says the agent, adding that if the candidate opposes it, he will not answer for the consequences. The wretched candidate writhes, disliking the whole business, and does say nothing.

Suppose there is talk, or something more definite than mere talk, of some Government work being undertaken in the constituency ; something that will bring work and wages for a large number, and trade to the shopkeeper. Can a candidate adopt an independent attitude towards the proposed public work ? Not he ! To put it honestly if bluntly, whatever he privately thinks of the scheme, he has got to support it, and it is a hundred to one that he will support it. There may be a candidate here and there

that has the courage and honesty openly to oppose a scheme which promises gain to the constituency, but of which on general national grounds he does not approve; and the reward for his strength of character will be that he will lose the election. Candidates do not often find themselves in this difficult position of conflict between their conscience and their interest over a proposed public work, because it is not often a scheme is so monstrous that no rational man can honestly support it. So the candidate is pretty certain to think the scheme a good one, or, at any rate, harmless, without any forcing of his conscience; or he does not realise that he is forcing it. It is only in retrospect, when he reflects that he has been on the side of every proposal likely to strengthen his position in the constituency, that he begins to consider whether his support has been genuine and his independence unimpeachable. It was noticed during the many years of opposition to running trams over Westminster Bridge and along the Embankment that Conservative Members of Parliament for constituencies north of the Thames mainly opposed the scheme, while Conservative Members of Parliament for constituencies south of the Thames to a man supported it. The real backing of the scheme—indeed the only case for it at all—came from the large numbers of employees living in South



London who went to a place of business on the other side of the Thames. Matters of this kind have far more influence on the results of elections than any political consideration, as a candidate very soon finds out. He must, of course, proclaim the established party commonplaces. The people must see that he floats with the main current of his party's policy. That is common form and expected. Beyond that he had better give his attention to non-political matters in the constituency. The common phrase "nursing a constituency" is an apt one. There is not much politics in nursing; it would be very bad nursing if there were. It is quite true that these non-political matters—religious organisations, hospitals, friendly societies, schools, orphanages, social clubs, athletics—are better worth his time than local politics. The most scrupulous man may cultivate these without any loss of self-respect; but it seems rather irrational that parliamentary elections should mainly turn on attention to matters over which Parliament has little or more often no control and with which Parliament is not likely to be concerned during the whole time the successful candidate will represent the constituency.

The calculation behind all this can be put shortly thus: constituents known to be strong supporters of one side will vote for that side



in any case ; if your friends, they need only to be brought to the poll ; if your opponents, you can do nothing with them. Therefore both these classes, who make the majority of the electorate, may be ignored. The remaining voters take little interest in politics, or they would be definitely on one side or on the other. So between these three political argument is shut out. There is no need to convert the convinced friend ; you cannot convert the convinced enemy ; and the rest do not come to meetings, neither knowing nor caring one straw about party politics. These, who are generally thought to determine elections in doubtful constituencies, can be got at only on lines affecting their ordinary life—their wages, income, business, pleasures. Questions of social reform will interest them, if they are themselves directly affected. This largely accounts for the ever increasing prominence given to social reform in election campaigns. Social reform is a very great national matter ; a candidate can hardly give his mind to a greater ; and it would be unfair and untrue to put down all the concern shown by candidates for social reform to interested electioneering calculations. But the way in which these questions are put in different constituencies according to the character of the district shows very plainly that the catching of votes does too often enter

into the matter. Social questions are seldom discussed on their merits at elections or indeed in Parliament. Dealing with the Insurance Act one side insists on what the voter will get from the State and from his employer; the other on what he will have to pay. The Free Trader declares that the victory of his side will bring down prices while Tariff Reform will mean starvation: the Tariff Reformer declares that his plan will mean good work for everybody and universal prosperity. Perhaps telling the truth would not be such bad electioneering after all.

It is also certain that only on a matter affecting him personally can a staunch supporter be alienated or a staunch opponent brought over, and this ten times to one will be a non-political matter. By opposing a proposed public work for instance, you might alienate even a friend and by supporting it you may bring over an opponent, should the rival candidate be simple enough to oppose the work.

On the whole, looking at the matter with the eye of a professional electioneer, this is a fair survey; and we can see what is the situation an honest candidate has to face. It is difficult almost to impracticability. Sometimes, no doubt, a great question of the moment, such as Home Rule in 1886 or Free Trade in 1906,

will really sway the people ; and professional electioneering will err, though not wholly even then. But such conditions are rare. It is not evidence of special depravity in British political natures that the parliamentary and party system has worked out in this way. It is the natural result of forces which only men far above the average in character could resist. Given human nature as it is, quite a slight examination of the elements of party would enable any fairly intelligent person to foresee what must happen. He cannot be at all surprised that party politics have worked out as they have done. For if politics were taken up only by able men who entered public life as a duty, a burden to be borne by the patriotic as cheerfully as may be, not as a career for ambition nor from any desire of distraction, there would be no parties and no parliamentary government. Such a temper would prevent differences of view from ever being bitter ; they would always be genuine even if they became acute, but they would not often become even acute. Amongst men of goodwill things settle themselves. Anything in the shape of division organised on a permanent basis would be seen to be absurd and could not be kept up. This is not indeed self-evident, and some may be inclined to dispute the assumption ; nor is it possible to test its justice

historically, for the conditions postulated have never come about and never will. But the ease with which differences do settle themselves amongst two or three men of goodwill, uninfluenced by tradition or organisation or considerations external from the matter in hand, certainly does suggest that in politics the same result would follow from the same conditions. See what has happened lately; party being in abeyance, men mostly opposed in their views meet to consider one of the most controversial of all questions—franchise—and they agree on a programme. Note too the rapprochement on Drink and tentatively on Ireland. If anyone chooses to object that parties are in themselves a good thing, not a necessary evil nor a something for want of a better, he will of course be going to the root of the matter and, if he is correct, the whole of the foregoing assumption falls to the ground. Some first-rate men have held this view—at least they have said they did—but they have mainly been party politicians whose whole vocation would be gone if parties dissappeared. Disraeli often argued that party was a useful institution in itself; but he was an enthusiastic Parliamentarian and knew that party was vital to the life of the constitution to which he was attached and was for ever eulogising.

The theory of party is community of action

for common ends. A few men find they have certain views in common and they see that by sticking together they are more likely to get their way than if they acted sporadically and without plan. Other small groups do the same. Two groups find their objects very similar and join up; but the homogeneity of the amalgamated group is not so close as it was in either of the two constituent groups. So the new group covers a correspondingly wider ground. Other groups, assimilating to one end or the other of the amalgamated group, also join in. This process of agglomeration goes on until a multitude of scattered and unrelated items have collected into two groups so large that any independent unit remaining outside has little or no chance. The agglomeration naturally settles into two large groups; because the original small groups containing men of extreme and sharply defined views will be the most opposed to and farthest removed from each other, and, being the most homogeneous and the most active because of their strong views, will be the first to draw others to them. Thus the process of gravitation will attract the other units to one or other of these consolidating groups according to their general tendency, some being caught merely by proximity. Whether or not this will bear examination historically as an account of the



growth of the party system, it is a true rationale of party. Seen thus, there is no exception either moral or intellectual to be taken to it. It is rather laudable. Yet it is easy to perceive that it contains the seeds of its own degeneracy. Men who have got together for ends not quite the same must all sacrifice something. The sacrifice may conceivably have begun in a high act of self abnegation, but it easily degenerates into a light abandonment of principle. Those who have joined for one purpose soon find themselves co-operating for quite another ; or when the first object has been obtained, elated with their power, they prefer not to disband but to go on to other conquests. In this way combination comes to be the one permanent element, the causes which are the justification or excuse for the combination being a quite inconstant quality. Party loyalty is not only entirely natural, but in many ways good ; for there is an element of personal friendship in it. Long association for any purpose gradually establishes a claim one upon another amongst the associates, which is not lightly to be abandoned. Instinctively he who withdraws has an uncomfortable feeling that he is in a way backing out of a common undertaking ; and those whom he leaves feels this at least as strongly and are usually not slow to remind the seceder of it. But if he is convinced that



the association as a whole is abandoning its undertaking, he cannot rightly be accused of desertion if he abandons them. They are the deserters. Only personal regard for those with whom he has been acting need then hold him back. He ought to feel a reluctance to leave them; and there the strain comes. It always requires moral courage to prefer principles to friends, and the sting of the position is that we are generally haunted with doubts whether we are not treating those we are leaving shabbily. Hence good-natured men, and most men are good-natured, generally stick to their old associates and party, and so party becomes an end in itself. Prominent politicians frequently plead—without any consciousness of insincerity—fidelity to party as proof of fidelity to principle. The man in the street generally thinks it quite enough to say “I have always been a Radical” or “I have always been a Conservative” to vindicate his political consistency. There have been times when a new and contradictory policy has been sprung upon a party, and the great bulk of the members have accepted it without difficulty. The abandonment of lifelong views did not seem to them to involve so serious a breach with their political past as would failure to stand by the party. The compelling power of party is as great as it is because to those who are

politically keen politics in fact mean party, and the far larger number who are not keen do not take the trouble to distinguish between party and policy. It is so much easier to label yourself Liberal or Conservative, and, if you care to vote at all, vote accordingly. There can be no serious doubt that most electors belong to this party or that by accident. Their fathers did, their friends do, or most of those they happen to live amongst do. The vast majority take their politics readymade, and it would be very difficult for them to do otherwise. How many have the time seriously to think out their own political position? The utmost the ordinary elector can do is to think about the "burning questions" of the day. In fact his party thinks about them for him: or more correctly it shows him his line. We are in this vicious circle; the man in the street follows the lead of his party but the party is not led by anyone. We speak of party leaders and party leading: it is not party leading: it is all party managing. Management is the Parliamentarian's conception of Government, and it can hardly be otherwise. Indeed it is part of the very object of our system to prevent strong leading. That which has been regarded as the most characteristically British political attitude has always suspected in strong leading a menace to private freedom.

Are the new Franchise proposals likely to do much to curb the power of the Machines? Proportional representation might do something, but it is idle to pretend to speak with any certainty of its working. We simply do not know. But we do know that an enormous addition of inexperienced voters will not abridge but will extend the field of the Machine's operation and will multiply opportunity. All that the Machines do now amongst men will have to be done on a larger scale. The great change, the introduction of the woman voter, adds an uncertain element. Are women likely to be less or more independent as voters than men? For the moment only a limited number of selected women will get the vote (the age limit is a very severe selection in itself). These may be a little more independent than the average man voter. But it is certain that in no long time votes will be given to women on the same terms as to men. Once the disability of sex is abandoned, no case is left for keeping out any woman who has the qualifications that enfranchise a man. We shall have practically manhood and womanhood suffrage. This will certainly give the Machines a vast field for enterprise. But seeing that men have no independence as voters, women can hardly have less. The chances are that the multitude of women voters will be about as independent

as the multitude of men. But undoubtedly amongst large classes of young women—maid servants, factory and other working girls, girls in retail shops, women clerks, teachers—the Machines will find quite new openings for action. Appeals can be made to them that would not move men at all. The personal and domestic bait will be much in evidence. Then the political indifference of a very large number of women will compel the Machines to exceptional activity. It will be a great business to get the women to vote. Victory may easily turn on who gets the larger number of his women supporters to go to the poll. Great indeed will be the rivalry of the Machines.

On the whole, the effect of the new proposals will hardly be to make one less ready to remove Imperial Questions from the sphere of party politics.

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## CHAPTER IV

### A NEW START

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**J**EALOUS as the average Englishman, especially the middle-class Englishman, may be of strong leading, he is all for it at a crisis which he feels to be national. He expects the need for strong leading automatically to produce both strong leaders and strong leading, and is angry when it does not. In ordinary times he acquiesces in, even if he does not actively prefer, a system which fosters neither strong men nor strong leading, and then grumbles at that which is sown in quiet times bearing its own fruit in times of storm. Or, to vary the metaphor, he puts dove's eggs under hens and expects them to turn out eagles when desired. He will not learn not to expect miracles. Miracles have happened: why should they not happen again? The situation should produce its man. Unfortunately, it does not always; and if it did, he might be too much handicapped by want of experience and training to be able to do much. Over and over again during the war have we heard of the need of a wholly different



type of man, different methods, different everything in times of great stress from what is needed or desirable in ordinary times. A generally easy-going temper, a reasonable slackness, a pleasant mood that does not take things too seriously is the natural line in peace. We intend to be comfortable, and we pity or look down on other countries who put themselves in strait waistcoats in order to be ready for what may never happen. It is even argued deliberately that on a general balance it is worth while to be caught napping at a time of emergency if you enjoy your sleep during the much longer time when there is no emergency. You have a better time than he who has one eye open always in order to have two open at a crisis. He may have the pull of you when the crisis comes, but he has paid an excessive price for the advantage. Well, if that is the calculation, it is irrational to be furious with somebody or everybody when the emergency does catch you napping. To exclaim that you ought to have been warned, you ought to have been waked up earlier, is to ignore the whole position you chose to adopt. If you want to sleep in quiet times, you must pay for it in the rough, just as he who wants to be wide awake in the storm must pay the price in the calm. To expect an entirely different order of things—suddenly changed ways and suddenly



changed human nature—the moment war bursts upon us, is absurd. The whole notion of a set of ideas and methods being wanted in war time different in kind from what is wanted in peace will not hold water. It is a question of degree, not of kind. We had for many years been content with a system which was not government, and then when the war came we suddenly called on the Ministry to govern. This was reversing engines; it was not putting on more steam; and the result was what might have been foreseen. Gradually, with much creaking and straining, the ship of State was brought round to meet the new conditions. But it was not till well on in the third year of war that an efficient order was developed.

We may make up our minds that if we want in the future to be ready for emergencies and able to cope with them rapidly when they come, we must change our ways and make a new start in peace time. But we have first to decide whether we do want to take up a new attitude to emergency—the chances of international complications and of war. Do we really want to be ready for everything? We are all saying now that we do; but it will be more helpful to try to see clearly what being ready for everything must mean and then decide whether the effort is worth the price. If we conclude that on the whole it is not worth the price, then

let us admit as much to ourselves frankly. If, on the other hand, we decide that the effort must be made, let us face it manfully and begin to think and act. At any rate let us give up talking and talking about the need for a new start and all the time be slipping back into the old ways.

It may be that a new start is as necessary socially and economically as politically; it may be that those who would learn and not shirk the lesson of the last two or three years must face changes not at all to their liking. But the urgent need in the eyes of all who believe in patriotism and in the British Empire is to build up an Imperial Government. This may prove compatible with social and economic developments most of us have hitherto regarded as incompatible. But if such changes are, to say the least, hazardous for the future of the Empire, that can only be a greater and more insistent reason for putting the men and machinery of Government in order.

Some seem to think that patching up will suffice—"restoring" the old constitution. They seem to think that an Act of Parliament reversing most of what had been done since 1906 will save the situation. Not that they would bring back exactly the position as it was before that year. They recognise that it is not possible to undo in that simple way, and that undoing

never results in anything being done. They would not, for instance, restore the House of Lords simply to its pre-Parliament Act conditions. The present position is impossible because we have no Second Chamber with any power at all; what we want is a new one, not the old re-built. That means some kind of elective body, chosen on a fancy franchise that could not last or on a simple franchise that might last but with fantastic electoral divisions, an artificial arrangement devised to produce something differing from the House of Commons. Obviously it is desirable that the Second Chamber should really differ from the First; if it does not it is mere duplication, and worse than superfluous. But how it is to differ in kind—in something essential as well as in accidents—except by being hereditary, or, at any rate, non-elective no-one has yet even suggested. But this essential difference—the hereditary non-elective character of the House of Lords—is just the one thing those who were discontented with the Lords were determined to be rid of. Nor is its restoration contemplated. Any other “restoration,” therefore, can hardly excite the enthusiasm of him who would try to build up a more effective Imperial Government. This sort of rebuilding suggests certain churches that have been well described as “severely restored.” This restoration spoils but does not bring back the

old ; it merely bars the way to something good that is new. It is not restoration that is wanted. It is a false diagnosis of the symptoms that suggests treatment by restoration. British politicians do not, for the most part, read Roman history—(we are always being warned of the snare of the historic parallel, and certainly one way to avoid it is not to know any history)—or our restorers would remember Sulla. He was the greatest of all restorers, and his work lasted about fifteen years. He knew but deliberately ignored the character of the case he was treating. He did not exactly try to put new wine into old bottles ; he was, on the contrary, most desirous of putting old wine into the old bottles ; but the old bottles were too far gone even for that. With us the danger is of trying to patch up very old bottles to make them hold new wine. Have we any right or reason to expect Parliament and Party to change its nature and draw out in the public service different qualities in men from those they have drawn hitherto ? Or, to put the position slightly differently, can we expect Parliamentary government in the stage of growth or decline which it has reached to throw out any new and vigorous shoot ? If it did, the old dry wood could be cut out or left to rot off, and the new growth to develop untrammelled. Some, no doubt, have faith

in the rejuvenating power of the crisis we are going through to make the parliamentary system, like Tannhauser's staff, put forth shoots and live again. But we have no right to calculate on the *deus ex machina*. It is safer to expect Parliament and parliamentary institutions to follow their appointed course, and look elsewhere for the new impulse necessary for new work.

There is general agreement that the inadequacy of our Government in the past to the demands of the Empire is largely due to party, and Parliament is impossible without party. This thought is making the average man, and many women as well, begin to wonder whether after all parliamentary Government is the necessity to national life we had been accustomed to think it was. It is difficult for him to think of England without a Parliament. And he will hardly try to do it. Still he is not sure there may not be some more excellent way of managing Imperial business than by means of an omnipotent Parliament which really means a handful of rhetoricians playing to and on six hundred less skilful rhetoricians trying in their turn to play to or on the people. You may cut down the supremacy of Parliament, you may define its powers and limits by Act, you may adjust the relations of First and Second Chambers as you will: but in the end if you govern the Empire through Parliament at all



you will always have left Government by rhetoricians for rhetoricians which is not the same thing as Government by statesmen for an Empire. In the nature of things, or at any rate in the nature of humans, those who are ultimately responsible to Parliament will think of Parliament most, and what Parliament really means we have seen. Shall we not be on the right track if we substitute Empire for Parliament, the government being ultimately responsible to the Empire and so thinking of the Empire rather than Parliament?

Two essential things are left out, if they are not excluded, by our present system. We have no Imperial Government—no government either including or representing all parts of the Empire—and the people though under a democratic regime have no concern in the settlement of questions of policy. The party machine has got the people to leave thinking to others and be content themselves with taking a party ticket. This is not intelligent democracy, if it is democracy at all, any more than it is good Government. It may be, and probably most democrats would admit as much, that the great majority of electors can never have time to give thought to political details or to take any executive part at all. But the ordinary elector ought to be able to form something of an opinion



on every broad questions of public policy. This he cannot do without thinking of them, and he will not think of them unless they are formally put before him for some sort of decision. Having them put to him in the uproar of a mass meeting—items in a general farrago of party points carefully touched with prejudice—does not make him think at all. At a small and quiet meeting he might learn more, but small meetings are apt to be addressed by small men, who may not be able to stir the few present to any interest in the question argued. What is wanted is some plan by which the work of Government may be efficiently thought out and carried into action at the same time that the intelligence of the people is brought into co-operation with the executive. Perhaps the best chance of securing this end would be to entrust the work of Government to a small number of able men untrammelled by reference to party or elections, who must take the opinion of the people by Referendum on the larger questions of policy. If it is said that these are precisely the questions the ordinary elector is not competent to decide, so that it is dangerous to submit them to him, this is simply an argument, good or bad, against democracy. Details the people cannot deal with, and if principles should not be put before them either, then the people can do nothing. But if origin-

ation and suggestion lies with the Executive, who would first think out the whole question with the utmost care and then put it before the people in a form they can understand; it is likely the people will give a reasonable commonsense answer, just as on the whole juries give reasonable verdicts. Were a case put to a jury, as political issues are put to the public at an election, with no judicial summing up and in all probability after hearing one of the advocates only, one would tremble for the interests of justice. Much depends on the atmosphere or temper in which a question is put and received. And after all, you must take some risks somewhere. Either you must risk a strong independent executive acting in their own interests instead of that of the public or putting their own interests before that of the public; or you must risk the less intelligence and the less expert information of the public betraying them into incompetent judgements. Both these risks may be minimised but the choice between them will always remain and will always have to be taken. In the conditions of to-day the choice is obviously already taken and everything must be done to help the public to answer honestly and intelligently the questions referred to it.

In this country, as perhaps in every other country, it is always wise, if a change is necessary

to make it as little violent as possible. It is, also, of course, policy to prevent it being obtrusive. Most people object to changes according as they affect themselves. Changes that may profoundly modify the future course of events but disturb present appearances but little are received with equanimity; whereas an obvious alteration in externals that will be forgotten a year hence often produces fiercely agitated opposition. Heroic changes, the clean sweep and so forth sound very well and no doubt appeal to youthful reformers and to enthusiasts of any age: the idea stirs the imagination. But always this violent course offends a larger number than it pleases; and it seldom leads to lasting results; and if it does, it is usually more a negative than a positive result. It is not the order of nature, where catastrophe is the exception, while fruitful growth and structural modification is effected by a slow accumulation of minute changes. On the whole the revolution that least disturbs the present order has the best chance of success—every revolution is necessarily a great disturbance of the existing order, but most revolutions can be effected with more destruction or less, according to taste, and the statesman will probably think the less the better.

To blot out Parliament and all that follows or straggles in its strain from British national

life would be a shock to the country so great that even the very large number who are profoundly dissatisfied with Parliament would probably rally to its side. Those who during the war have daily wished Parliament and all politicians at the bottom of the sea would be horribly alarmed at the proposed fulfilment of their desire. Their conservatism would be too strong for them. Perhaps it would not have been too much for them a year after the war began, but feeling has had time to cool down; and the root-and-branch mood has passed. Seen from without Parliament and elections are so inextricably interwoven with English life that one can hardly think of it without them. The very disregard of Parliament which now obtains springs partly from its extreme familiarity. Yet, when it comes to parting, one is apt to regret that which he had despised. A reformer with the genius and power of Julius Cæsar might improve Parliament away but any less man would only sweep away himself. Without any sweeping change of this kind it would be possible to withdraw from parliamentary control certain matters of Imperial concern. An Imperial Council, not responsible to any parliament, British or Colonial, might take over the work of the Foreign Office, Admiralty, War Office, India Office and Colonial Office. The Council

would include representatives of all the self governing Dominions, with an Indian assessor to the Secretary of State, and one of the British members might be a representative of organised labour. This Council would be obliged to refer to the whole body of electors throughout the Empire certain fixed questions every year, and other questions, involving changes, as they came up.

Such a scheme, which will be discussed in detail in succeeding chapters, would leave Parliament so far as the general public was concerned almost where it was. Parliament would still deal with the matters which almost exclusively occupied and exclusively interested it for many years previous to the war—taxes, trade, franchise, education, social reform, labour, land. These are practically the only questions the people heard anything about at elections; and elections would still happen and the same subjects be talked about as before. “Liberal” and “Conservative” would still go on: the debates would seem to the reader, and largely to the listener, precisely what they were before. The newspapers would have just as much to write about: neither their pages nor their bills would be deprived of “copy” by the change. There would still be openings of Parliaments to describe: they would still be able to record that Mr. Balfour’s



servant was seen in Whitehall on the first day of the session : that Mr. Nobody was the first to put in an appearance at the House : that Mr. Churchill called on the Prime Minister. They could still put in large letters on their bills "First Arrivals." The public could still have the show on opening day, and there would still be addresses for parliamentary aspirants to move in both houses. All the trappings of Parliament would remain. The political career would still be open to ambitious young men, anxious for fame or a serious amusement. Honours, orders and rewards of all the recognised sorts would still be given as before. And those who were in earnest about home affairs, including such vast matters as education and labour reform, would find as much work as they could want in Parliament. Those who find Parliament attractive and interesting now would find it attractive and interesting then.

Neither would Parliament seriously suffer as an instrument of education : which is probably its most useful function. Parliamentary life and election campaigns do make a great many people think a little about large and important questions who otherwise would not think of them at all. It would be something of an educational loss if politics were to drop out of public attention. Not that they would in fact drop out if Parliament ceased to be.

There is as much political talk when Parliament is "up" as when Parliament is sitting. The newspapers will always provide plenty of political fodder. So far as Imperial and Foreign affairs go, under a scheme such as has been suggested the public should take more interest in them than they do now. These matters would not be so much overshadowed by domestic issues as at present. Moreover the electorate would then be placed in a more responsible position vis-a-vis Foreign and Imperial policy. On the whole the public would soon hardly notice that there had been any change at all: but the difference would be that we should then have an Imperial Government.

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## CHAPTER V

### THE IMPERIAL GOVERNMENT

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**B**Y this plan we should have a Government manned by and representing the whole Empire with power to deal with British imperial interests wherever they were involved. The status of the Colonial Parliaments, which have now not even a nominal place in Imperial matters, would be unaffected directly. Thus there was no need to discuss the parliamentary and party system as it works in the Dominions. On the whole, the evidence does not seem to suggest that it enjoys any immunity there from the vices which have mastered it here. But the British Parliament would be profoundly modified in its substance, being no longer supreme although hardly changed in any of its accidents. Hitherto, there has been no Imperial Government, although the British Parliament has called itself Imperial and the British Government is responsible for the government of the Empire. It is responsible for countries and peoples, being part of the British polity, over whom it

has practically no control. There is, on the one hand, no authority really supreme throughout the Empire, and, on the other hand, there are vast portions of the Empire whose people have no more organic association with the supposed British Imperial Government than they have with the Governments of Russia or of the United States of America. The King, no doubt is supreme, and his sovereignty acknowledged as much, and in the same way in Australia and Canada as in Great Britain. But the British King acts only through his Ministers, and his Ministers in the self-governing Dominions have no jurisdiction without their own colony. His Ministers here, "at home"—in the United Kingdom—have control over matters concerning the whole Empire, and in form have a certain jurisdiction even in self-governing Dominions. Thus the Crown in a sense is divided against itself. Its action through a Dominion Government is limited, absolutely; its action through British Ministers is limited in some directions, but in others it is theoretically unlimited. The King is supreme in Canada, but in Canada he cannot deal with any matter, say, of Indian policy or with foreign affairs. In Britain he can deal with all these things, but there he is not supreme over trade policy in a Dominion, even when it involves trade relations with foreign Govern-

ments. A more unintelligible division of power in a single sovereignty has never been, and indeed will never be; nor would it ever have been but by accident. Such an arrangement—or want of arrangement—deliberately envisaged would not be tolerated or even considered. But it is true that anomalies allowed to grow up unnoticed in this way—no-one thinking it his business to trouble about them—sometimes work better than carefully thought out schemes: and the logical absurdity of the present state of things need not, as it very certainly would not, trouble us much if it brought with it no practical disadvantages. But unfortunately it does. The assumption that the British Government is supreme in matters affecting the whole Empire is breaking down, as necessarily in view of the changed circumstances of the self-governing Dominions, it must break down: and the result is that there is no Imperial Government.

There can be no more directly or essentially Imperial matter than the defence of the Empire against foreign attack, or the assertion of its power vis-a-vis other countries. And the key to policy under these heads is ultimately power, and power means Navy and Army. Yet the Imperial Government has neither right nor power to call upon the self-governing Dominions to contribute one man or one penny to either



Navy or Army. Danger to the Empire—war—does not alter the position. A world combination against the British Empire would give our Imperial Government no right to claim help from the self-governing Dominions either in money or men. In peace time the Imperial Government cannot direct or superintend the training of a Colonial militia; it can at most give advice when asked. There was much significance in the Dundonald incident in Canada.

The Imperial Government has no power to settle general conditions and terms of military service for the Empire—it cannot even influence these conditions outside of the United Kingdom, India, and the Crown Colonies, and shrinks from doing this in some parts within the United Kingdom. Whether military service shall be compulsory or voluntary is a strictly Imperial question, if any question can be: it cannot be local; yet in the British Empire it is treated as a local question. In one part of the Empire compulsory service obtains; in another part it does not. British citizenship carries no even responsibility.

The “Imperial Government” cannot control even during a life-and-death war the shipping of the Empire. Yet it is obviously impossible for the Government to take forethought and provide for food and other emergencies that will arise, if it cannot calculate closely the

shipping resources it will have at its use. In the third year of the war when deficiency of tonnage was pressing and America had not yet come in, two British ships, registered one in Canada the other in Newfoundland, were diverted to a new American line to ply between the United States and South Africa. One of these ships was transferred during the war from the United Kingdom register to Canada, and so passed out of the control of the Imperial Government.

So little have we an Imperial Government that the Government called Imperial is unable to assert or to decide the right of a British subject to free entry into all countries under the dominion of the British King: the right to move from one part of the Empire into another. We have had the spectacle of one country within the Empire striving successfully to keep out of its borders their fellow subjects from another country within the Empire: though happily the War Conference this year has taken a step to compose this matter for the future. But the Imperial Government, standing in loco parentis to the people of India, was helpless. Evidently the *pax Britannica* is a very different thing from the *pax Romana*. The British Government could talk and it could write: it could advise, it could demur, and it could soothe: but it could do nothing.

Further evidence that its character as an Imperial Government was gone can not be heeded. Obviously it had lost all power to control or even revise the Acts of a Dominion Government on an essentially Imperial issue, an issue involving the rights and status of every British subject in the Empire and pertinent to every Dominion Government as well as to the Government of India and the Crown Colonies. The point here—be it noted—is not whether the South African Government was right, nor whether the rights of coloured British subjects as to settlement in other parts of the Empire require regulation, but that a Dominion Government took the settlement of such a question into its own hand instead of referring it to the Imperial Government. Plainly it was perceived that there was no Imperial Government or this could not have been done. The “Imperial Government” knew itself, and the South African Ministers knew the “Imperial Government.”

This absence of an Imperial Government has necessarily tended to make the different units making up the Empire look at things from a private and sometimes a separate and even divergent point of view; a tendency saved, though happily it has been saved, from worse results only by the strong sentiment of racial fellowship and pride. The want of a head to the Empire has been partly made up by the

greatness of its heart. But the strain has often been, at the very least, uncomfortable. One might like to forget, though it is better to be warned than to forget, that Mr. Philip Schreiner, when Premier of Cape Colony at the time of the Boer War, announced that he would wish to keep the colony neutral. Neutral between what parties? Between the British Empire and her enemies then in the field. Yet Mr. Schreiner did not regard himself as a rebel; to him the attitude he had announced seemed quite compatible with the constitutional position of the Cape as a British colony.

Not less significant was Sir Wilfred Laurier's pronouncement *urbi et orbi* that Canada, or, at any rate, a Canadian Government of which he was the head would not join in a war waged by the British Imperial Government, of which his Government and the Dominion did not approve. Morally, this may be a plausible position; it sounds even attractive, but that is not its significance. Its significance is in the conception it betrays of Canada's position constitutionally. That Sir Wilfred Laurier could think that Canada was free to come into or stand out of a British war solely according to her own will shows that he did not conceive Canada as part of an Empire or Commonwealth at all, but as an independent unit without obligation either to the United Kingdom or

any other part of the Empire ; and, of course, any notion that the "Imperial Government" was anything different from any colonial or local Government was far from his mind. No doubt the independence of Canada would not mean to him political separation, but absolute free equality with the United Kingdom and other British units. But the position he took up, whatever he meant, carried him much farther. An aggregate of free sovereign peoples acting together for common ends would not leave any one of them free to co-operate with the others or stand aloof from them at its pleasure. It would have either to come along with the general decision or leave the association. It might be left free to withdraw entirely from the association at its will, which would be very unusual and would point to the loosest possible connection, but Sir Wilfred Laurier wants more than this. Canada, in his view, was free to refuse to co-operate with the rest of the Empire, or British confederacy, or whatever political arrangement be conceived, and yet remain in the general polity a perfectly loyal unit. For Sir Wilfred does not seem to have contemplated separation. Yet he must have known that he was throwing over the Revised Regulations, which make the Imperial officer commanding in chief in war time supreme in a military sense in Canada as much as in



Britain, supreme over local as well as Imperial forces. Such a conception of the position of Canada is so anomalous that it becomes intelligible only if construed in relation to the facts of the so-called Imperial Government. At the back of Sir Wilfred's mind, we may assume, was the feeling that he would not be bound by a decision of war or peace by the British Government which he did not regard as an Imperial Government at all; that Canada had as much right to decide as the United Kingdom. In other words, he was not flouting the Imperial Government, but asserting, what was true, that there was no Imperial Government. It would, of course, be quite misleading to take either Mr. Philip Schreiner or Sir Wilfred Laurier as representing public opinion in the pronouncements we have referred to: some would agree with them, more would not. But no public man could so have expressed himself if there had been an Imperial Government in fact as well as in name.

The present position allows of an unfortunate way of looking at our relations one to another in both United Kingdom and Dominions. We "at home" are inclined to feel that as we have to pay nearly the whole of the Defence Bill of the Empire, we are entitled to settle its policy as we think fit. We pay, therefore we ought to choose. Essentially the same attitude is

assumed conversely by the Australian or the Canadian. He says: "You at home call the tune, therefore you ought to pay the piper. If we like to give something towards the Navy, and to help with men in time of war, it is entirely an act of grace. You have no claim as of right on us, we do not admit any duty to contribute at all." The position on both sides is perfectly rational; there is nothing to say against it as a business relation; but between brothers it is not the happiest way of looking at things. It ought not to be a true way. But as things are now, it is a true way, and is contrary to the brotherly relation which is the life of the Empire. Such an arrangement would severely try the good fellowship of any family; it makes for divergency instead of unity of interest: for discrepancy instead of harmony of view. It has too much accustomed people to think of diversity between Dominion and Imperial interests instead of community; even to contemplate with a certain apathy the falling away of some portions of the Empire. There was a time when it was almost a commonplace of political conversation here that, if a self-governing colony wished to leave us, no attempt would be made to prevent it. (It is curious, by the way, that many went on saying this in spite of the South African War, when very vigorous efforts were made to suppress

Cape rebels by force. Also the Irish attempt at secession was put down by force. It is not encouraging to Irish loyalty to hear that a British colony that chose to rebel and set up on her own account would only be blessed by the mother country, and told to go in peace. The Irishman might ask why is that heinous in him which would be venial in a Canadian?) The idea of a part of the Empire wishing to break away ought not to occur to us, and it shows the loose and unsatisfactory notion we have of the Empire that until lately such an event has hardly seemed unnatural. It is a strange perversion of natural affection that takes it as a sign of good-will to a colony that we should be willing to acquiesce in its breaking away from us and take no step to prevent it. "If you like to go, go: I wash my hands of you" is not the attitude of affection of any kind. "I will not let you go, for I cannot do without you" is much more complimentary. Citizens of the Dominions will hardly thank certain people here, who take themselves very seriously, for their extreme readiness to part with the Dominions whenever they want to go, though indeed they are more likely not to have heard of these people at all. Happily one hears very much less of this kind of thing than one did: and we may hope that the war will give it its coup de grace. It will, if with a new era we get rid

of the debris of an old regime and start again. For this is the outcome of miserable want of foresight, of indolence, and neglect in the past. Elizabethan statesmen had the imagination to conceive a great future in overseas settlements; they saw them as the expansion of England: they planted English institutions on the other side, and left them to grow, not untended. Later they were possibly tended too much, interfered with: but they were not neglected. Very different was it with the early and mid-Victorian politicians. If these did not forget the Colonies, it was only because they could not. Most of them would have been only too glad to be wholly oblivious of their very existence. They were never more upset than when anything happened to remind them that there were Colonies, and if it was impossible to ignore what had happened and they had to act, it was a sore grievance. We have an unerring gauge of the temper of the mid-Victorian attitude to the Colonies in Disraeli's description of them as "dead weights." They were dead weights because they interfered with the political game at home. Years before, in a letter, he speaks of the "wretched Colonies," wretched because they interfered with his budget. And Disraeli had more imagination than any other politician of the nineteenth century, and if he had not always the great vision of Empire now commonly

attributed to him, he was at no time "little England." Indeed, in 1851 he had suggested that representatives of the Colonies should sit in the British Parliament. If Disraeli then could let the political game under his eyes so completely obscure his vision of the colonial future, what might we expect of the ordinary politician of that day? We might expect precisely what we got. Total incapacity to gauge the colonial situation expressed in active neglect. Neglect indeed was developed into a policy. The grant of self-government is now generally described as a statesmanlike and far-sighted calculation of the best interests of the Colonies and the Empire. The Colonies were to be allowed to develop on their own lines, free from interference from "home." Thus they would be able to grow untrammelled and fulfil their proper destiny. What that destiny was is generally not said: for any attempt to answer that question brings into difficulty the whole assumption of the far-sighted statesmanship of the men who granted self-government. If it is said that the destiny contemplated was the ultimate separation from England to set up an independent State, we do not like the idea in these days, though it obviously fits in with the action of the statesmen in question. Yet, if it was their idea, they were hopelessly incapable of reading the future, and without



the first quality of a statesman. On the other hand it is impossible to say that these men thought the destiny of the Colonies was to grow up integral parts of a British Empire, to be an expansion of England; for it is clear from statements of their own that they thought nothing of the kind. If what they did was in fact the best thing for the growth of the Empire, it was a marvellously lucky accident: it was neither statesmanship nor foresight. The truth is that nearly all English politicians were sick of the Colonies and were only too well pleased to give them self-government in the full belief that it must lead to their final dropping off from England. It was the easiest and an apparently happy way of ridding themselves of a nuisance. The Colonies were just allowed to drift: there was no idea at all of that educating them in a manly way by letting them have responsibility and freedom, which in the light of events has in later times been read into their policy. That the responsibility of freedom is a great educational factor few will dispute, certainly none will who has seen anything of the working of English public schools. But it is not the whole of education and cannot be given recklessly and unintelligently. Whether it was given prematurely or too suddenly instead of in stages to this colony or that is a question much open to debate. But it is quite certain,

as Disraeli expounded in one of his later speeches, that had the politicians who granted self-government been farther sighted and conceived of the Colonies as to the expansion of England in its infancy, they would also have conceived the policy of self-government very differently. With the future of the Empire always in their view, they would have been infinitely more interested in the Colonies than they were, and it would have been clear that they cared for them. Putting before them their destiny of equal partnership in the Empire with the United Kingdom, they would have made it easy for them to develop on lines the most harmonious with the common interest of a great Empire. They would have regarded them in a sense as heirs, neither taking advantage of them nor leaving to them what they were as yet not old enough to deal with. They would have associated them as soon as possible with the Government of the Empire, and reciprocally the Colonies would have grown into the Imperial system. Developments incompatible with or not easily fitted into the common polity would have been discouraged from the beginning. An Imperial military system, trade policy, and government would have grown up almost spontaneously. It would have come without irk, without any hurt to rightly independent feeling in the Colonies; self-government in

domestic affairs would have been as full as now. But instead of caring for them as heirs of the Empire, Georgian England was inclined to exploit them, and Victorian England to let them "rip"; *hinc illæ lacrimæ*, or many of them.

However, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa have come through somehow. Happily they have now all become too big and too important to be neglected. They are all determined to play their part in the game of Empire, and the British Government, very glad of their assistance, is desirous only that United Kingdom and Dominions together should turn their common energies and resources to the best account. The time when the Colonies could be exploited or neglected is past. Perhaps it is they who are able to be "difficile" now rather than the United Kingdom.

But unfortunately the new era has not to do with a clean slate. Haphazard colonial policy has inevitably resulted in particularism, which is not the same thing as a healthy diversity, in dealing with common Imperial needs. Take the Navy. Canada does not contribute. Australia keeps up a local Squadron. New Zealand and the Cape Colony give money for a ship of war—a contribution to the Imperial Navy without conditions.

To the Army all the Colonies have contributed

men and money during the war : but on no general Imperial plan. The soldiers coming from one Dominion are paid at a different rate from those coming from another Dominion or from the British Army. It illustrates the present confusion that one has to speak of the "British Army" in distinction from, say, the Canadian or Australian contingents ; as if they were not British soldiers. Yet they are not soldiers of the British Army. Some speak of the "Imperial troops" as against the Dominion contingents, which is worse still.

In peace time the Dominions have their own militias. These are primarily local forces and it is likely that every Dominion will continue to keep up a local military force ; and certainly it is desirable. But while these will necessarily be under the immediate control of the Dominion government, they should also fit into a general Imperial system. These militias are voluntarily put at the disposal of the Imperial government in time of war : so it would be well if in peace time the Army Council had some touch with them and a voice by right in their organisation and training. These local forces would be in addition to the Imperial Army to which the whole Empire would contribute on the same basis.

Every self-governing colony, again, has framed its own trade system with a view to its own

position solely, as though it were a wholly detached state. The United Kingdom has done precisely the same. It is not a question of trade policy being one and utterly the same in all parts of the Empire, and opinions may differ much as to what is the best trade policy for the Empire as a whole. The point is that there has never been an Imperial trade policy at all. United Kingdom, India (so far as was allowed) and the Dominions have all acted without reference one to another. There is no recognition of any common commercial interest. Further it is to be noted that by steady pressure the Dominions have claimed and have obtained the power to make treaties of their own with foreign powers. Not, of course, without the cognisance of the Central Government, but without its practical intervention. Dominion Ministers negotiate direct with foreign Governments.

All these particularist developments are the natural and rational outcome of the position into which the United Kingdom and the other units of the Empire have been allowed to drift. The Dominions have no power in Imperial questions. The Imperial Government has practically no status inside the Dominions; there is no Government representing both United Kingdom and Dominions. In such circumstances is it strange that people "at home"



do not realise the importance of Canada or Australia : that they know so little about them ? The truth is that in the matters that most interest people in the United Kingdom these countries do not come in, or do not evidently come in. During the war, of course, the gallantry of the Australian, Canadian, and other overseas contingents have kept the Dominions continually in the public eye here. Yet even the very admiration one hears on all sides of the ready answer of the Dominions to the call to war betrays a sense that they are not part and parcel of one nation with the United Kingdom : or, at any rate, that there is something which makes it not a matter of course that Australia or Canada would send troops and help in every way possible. We do not think of the British Empire as a self contained political entity. As Sir William Robertson said at the Canada dinner last year : " There were many people in this country who had doubts, and certainly many who had been quite astonished at what the Oversea Dominions had done. Why should there have been any astonishment ? It was due to a want of confidence born of ignorance. In other words, we did not understand one another in this Empire of ours."

On the other hand, the colonial citizen is necessarily inclined to look at things from the point of view of his own colony. It is not

primarily the business of his Government to look at things from an Imperial point of view ; and he is prone to think of his colony as the one really important thing in the Empire, and perhaps in the world. It is not easy for him to realise that in the interest of the whole it may be necessary that a part—his colony—shall in this or that be subordinated. In times past nearly all Imperial duties—defence, military, naval, and foreign policy—having been done for him, an irresponsible temper naturally ensued together with an air of self-sufficiency if not self-conceit. The sentiment of Empire a citizen of the Dominions usually has strongly—more strongly than large numbers of Englishmen, Manchesterism having never taken root overseas—but he realises less its facts. He can hardly know what it really means. There have been, and are, great Dominion Ministers of whom it would be absurd to say this ; but they are exceptional.

But it is said all these things do not matter—these anomalies, these constitutional defects, these temperamental weaknesses : when the strain comes, they disappear. The present political relations between United Kingdom and Dominions may be indefensible ; we may have no Imperial Government : but the right spirit is behind, and in spite of any formal shortcomings, it makes the present arrangement work, which is everything.

No doubt, it is true that a right spirit can make a bad system work, while the best system is useless with a wrong spirit. But this is an argument for a good spirit, not for a bad system. It is precisely because the right spirit is there that it is worth taking infinite trouble to give it free passage. That this spirit in the end gets over most of the stumbling blocks we have allowed to come and remain in its way can hardly be a reason for leaving them there. It is not the stumbling blocks that make the spirit : on the contrary, they chafe it. There will always be plenty of difficulties to exercise and discipline the spirit : we do not need to invent them or deliberately to let them be for fear of the spirit "waxing gross." But in fact it is not true that these anomalies and defects in system do no practical mischief : they do, and evidences of this mischief have not been wanting of late. Some of these injurious results are on the surface.

(1) The want of an authority supreme throughout the Empire makes it impossible to mobilise the Empire's resources for War, or for any other purpose. Much as has been done in this direction, no-one will pretend that the resources of the whole Empire have been tapped, or nearly so.

(2) The British or Imperial Government cannot gauge beforehand what the contribution

of the dominions in men or money will be in the event of War. Thus they cannot tell what strength they can put into the contest, should it seem to them necessary or wise to fight. There are understandings between Central and Dominion Governments on this subject even in peace time, and when war is upon us or even imminent communications take place. They certainly did before the outbreak of this war with some precision. But this is not putting the Central executive in a position to gauge the resources of the Empire as a guide to its policy. For that it must be in touch with them, have full knowledge of them, and be in a position to claim their use the whole time. Yet the calculation of resources must be policy's main determinant, or at the very least a necessary preliminary to decision. However right or desirable it may be to take a stand on this or that point, it is no use doing so if you have not the strength to stay there. Not knowing where you are, how can you tell where you will be? Yet that is the position of our Government. They may, no doubt, safely assume that the Dominion Governments will give some help in the event of war; but it is wrong that in so grave a matter there should be room for assumption at all. Surely there should be knowledge instead of presumption. But even reasonable presumption fails when it is a question how

much aid the Central Government may look for from the Dominions. Probably indeed the Dominion Governments themselves could not say very long beforehand. They cannot know until the time comes. Maybe this deficiency could be met by means of permanent treaties between the Dominions and the United Kingdom ; but a strong Imperial executive would be more effective. Treaties might give occasion for unprofitable haggling and delay. Continuity would be difficult to preserve. The changes of party politics in the Dominions and "at home" would cause treaties to be revised in this direction or that with little regard to Imperial necessity. A good deal of the uncertainty that now attends the Dominions' contribution would remain.

(3) The present relation between United Kingdom and Dominions tends to make Foreign Governments think of them as practically separate and independent States. They are thus inclined to speculate upon their action in the event of the British Government going to war as a doubtful quantity. They have not felt that in fighting the United Kingdom they will of necessity be fighting the whole British Empire : not in fact, even if they must be technically. This necessarily has an effect on their policy. If they knew that they must in any event reckon with the entire resources



of the whole British Empire, they might be proportionately more cautious. Any venture that might bring a Power into conflict with the United Kingdom would become an even more serious matter than it is now. In this war indeed the Central Powers found out their mistake very soon, but after, not before, war began. It may be a good lesson for the future, but lessons are apt to be forgotten.

Somehow we do get over all these difficulties, but we pay the price; and one day it may happen that the price is prohibitive. With still the best will in the world we may find the way barred. Trusting to luck has in it an element of wisdom, for there must always be many things that cannot be foreseen, and which it is mischievous to attempt to provide for. But it is not wise to leave to luck what can be foreseen, and so can be provided for. Fortunately, the logic of events seem likely to force a re-settlement of Imperial organisation. The whole gravamen of the position has changed. Until recently it was rather the United Kingdom that was inclined to "grouse" at an arrangement that left it to pay the bill and do most of the work of Imperial defence. Now it is the Dominions who are claiming a right to share in the Government of the Empire. They cannot be expected to wait indefinitely, and it is not likely that they will. It will not be possible

to let the matter slide, which is by far the best reason for expecting that something will be done. Certainly there is now a general consensus of the best opinion that a new setting must be provided for the various constituents of the Empire, a setting more congruous with the truth of the situation.

Many of the best minds, both here and in the Dominions, have long felt this, and probably many more have thought the same who shrank from saying so publicly. Public men have been very shy of speaking plainly about the relations of the Dominions and the United Kingdom. If they did not avoid it altogether, they trod very gingerly as on very delicate ground. Pious sentiments were expressed, but the line was drawn at anything definite. It was considered too dangerous. The story of the Imperial Federation League is very significant. The League thrived considerably on sentiment and general propositions. It got public men of the greatest significance to decorate it and to speak for it. But after a time it occurred to a good many of its members that the League should do something to attain its objects: it could not or ought not to live for ever on dinners and platitudes: and the thought became insistent. The result was a scheme, though Mr. Gladstone said it was not a scheme, because finance was not gone into. At any rate, it was something, and

that something proved too much for the League. It died of the effects. It is quite curious what a nervous diffident atmosphere hung about Imperial Federation all through: largely, no doubt, because it set out to get the support of men of both parties. This necessitated the avoidance of all party help and party methods, and the sinking of all sorts of important issues for fear of setting Imperial Federationists of opposite parties by the ears. This made the propaganda unreal and deadly dull. Possibly the movement was premature, though it was not wholly barren: certainly Dominion Governments were inclined to sniff at it. They had a way of instructing their representatives at an Imperial conference not to discuss Imperial Federation. The public mind, both here and in the Dominions, was not trained on to this point of view as it is now, neither was there the present revulsion from party and politicians. On the whole, it is not a matter for amateur and irresponsible propaganda: it will have to be done by Statesmen, if done at all, and perhaps the fewer of them the better. There was always something pitiable and even ridiculous in the obvious inadequacy of the Imperial Federation League to its enormous object. And of independent thought on the question, in which such a body could have been useful, the League was sterile from difference of opinion within.

There are, of course, various ways of providing an Imperial Government. Many suggestions have been made in speeches and books, some of them more or less resembling that set out here.

The simplest plan is Imperial Government in the strict sense, the plan of the Roman Empire, by which the whole Empire was governed from the centre directly or indirectly; local Government being left in the hands of the local communities. It was on the whole a wonderful success; perhaps the most successful experiment in Government there has yet been. Neither was it anti-popular or inconsistent with personal freedom generally, though it was not in the conventional and unintelligent phrase of modern times "free government." The Emperor, or more correctly the Government, took its Ministers from all classes and from all parts of the Empire. The able man, whatever his position or race by birth, had a better chance of getting on and rising to a high position than he has or had in most free countries. Provincials more than once rose to be Emperors. Were the British Empire governed as was the earlier Roman Empire, citizens of the Dominions would have more power and more part in the Government of the Empire than they have now. But other times, other minds. For Englishmen to-day this model of Government is not in the picture.

Another way is a British Confederacy as distinct from a Federal Union. This is roughly an agreement between a number of Sovereign States for certain definite objects. The Sovereignty of every constituent State naturally implies that its consent is necessary to the validity of any Act of the Confederacy and practically its right to withdraw. This kind of Union is not in effect much more than an alliance between foreign countries. The Central Administration of a Confederacy, if there is one, is not a Government ; it is an agency on behalf of the whole, the constituent States carrying this advice into effect. A re-arrangement of the British Empire on these lines would not be a consolidation, but rather a dissolution. It would, at any rate, be breaking the bone in order to re-set it. It could be adopted only as a last resource, when it had become evident that there was not enough homogeneity between United Kingdom and Dominions to make closer union possible. Under such an arrangement military and naval administration would be more difficult and probably less effective than now.

Then there is the Federal plan. In any event there must be a Federal element in the Imperial organisation, for it already exists in the Dominions, and only a very foolish man will disturb existing colonial institutions if Imperial



needs can be satisfied otherwise. But when one speaks of a Federal constitution one generally has in mind the United States. Shall we take the American constitution for a model? The American Union is a very different thing from a Confederacy. It results in a consolidated State, in fact, whatever may be its theory. Its constituent parts are not really Sovereign States at all. They surrendered their Sovereignty when they left the control of Army and Navy to a President elected by the whole people. However much the Government and people of a constituent "State" may dissent from the use of Army and Navy made by the President, they must put up with it if the majority of the States' representatives in Congress support it. Therefore, it is not a Sovereign State and this adds to the adaptability of American arrangements to British use. But the Crown, the corner-stone of any British Imperial system, is an institution so different from the American President that on the whole the United States can hardly be looked to as a model. The Australian Commonwealth may call its Second Chamber a Senate and the other a House of Representatives, but its constitution is not on the American plan. It knows nothing of the American pains to separate executive from legislative power. Indeed the Australian constitution is at pains to identify them, disallowing

Ministers of State to hold office for more than three months without a seat in Parliament. Also, the Australian Parliament is, on the British model, dissoluble at the pleasure of the Governor-General, which means the Government of the day; in sharp contrast to Congress elected for a fixed term which neither Congress nor President can abridge. The life of an American administration, again, is unaffected by congressional majorities. The Americans find the intricate complication of their constitution, which national pride and traditions endear to them, sometimes difficult to work. It would not be wise for others in different circumstances, and with different antecedents, to try to copy it. In the American Congress those who favour a new Parliament for the British Empire may perhaps find something of a precedent. It is, at any rate, relevant as a guide; perhaps some would say as a warning. But probably there will be general agreement that the best and most practical way in this, as in every English problem, will be not to seek a clean slate and a brand new start, but to find a point in something we already have from which to go on to the new. The new part will be expansion or development.

On these lines was the proposal, favoured by Disraeli at one time in his career, to allow representatives of the Colonies to sit in the

House of Commons. At that time there was much to be said for the proposal. It would have been a not infelicitous way of bringing Colonies and United Kingdom together: tentatively and gradually it would have accustomed Colonial statesmen to Imperial business, and might well have led almost insensibly to the direct association of the Colonies in the Government of the Empire. The logical difficulty of restricting the Colonial representatives to discussion and vote on Imperial issues would, no doubt, have been great; and it is almost certain that the line of distinction between British and Imperial would often have been passed for the sufficient reason that no criterion would always hold. Matters must from time to time be in issue, which it would not be possible to classify as Imperial or domestic, being, in fact, both or neither. But in practice this would not have mattered very much. Such questions would not come up frequently, and the difficulty would settle itself according to the circumstances of the moment. The point could become pressing only if the Colonial contingent were deliberately unreasonable and determined to interfere in the domestic affairs of the United Kingdom. In that event the whole arrangement would probably break down. It could work only amongst men of goodwill; which is true of parliamentary Government

as a whole. But there is no reason to think that the Colonial representatives would have acted in this way; and in any case they would at first have been very few, and would probably have taken their tone in most things from those around them. Thus to introduce Colonial influence would essentially have been statesmanship on the lines of growth. A small beginning might have grown into very big things with the saving of much difficulty that has now to be met.

But the time for this experiment has gone by. The Dominions are great and powerful communities and would not consent to be merged in the British Parliament: and if they were represented in numbers justified by their population and status, Parliament would become unworkable. It could not manage both the domestic affairs of the United Kingdom and the general business of the Empire.

In fact in present conditions this proposal, on closer examination, is seen to resolve itself into another of the proposed solutions of the Imperial Government problem—an Imperial Parliament. Parliament as we have it now is called "Imperial," but it does not represent the Empire, and gives much more time to domestic than to Imperial questions. The Imperial Parliament contemplated by those who put it forward as the best means to an Imperial

Government would be a new machine independent of, and in addition to the British Parliament, in which the United Kingdom and all the self-governing Dominions would be alike represented. This implies an Imperial Ministry, responsible to the King and to the Imperial Parliament. In other words the plan is to govern the Empire in exactly the same way as the United Kingdom is governed now: it is not an expansion of the British Parliament and Government, but an Imperial copy of it. It would necessarily involve the withdrawal from cognisance of the British Parliament of all strictly Imperial matters, which in its turn implies the distinction between Imperial and domestic. This distinction is proverbially difficult to draw, but it is a difficulty incidental to every suggestion for an Imperial Government. This settled, the constituents of the new Parliament would have to be defined. Its members might be selected by the Parliaments of Britain and of the Dominions, which would make the Imperial Parliament a popular assembly indirectly elected. This would in effect mean selection by the British and Dominion Ministries of the day, or something very near it, and would leave the local Parliaments (local as against the Imperial Parliament) still pre-occupied with and powerful in Imperial matters. The elections to those local Parliaments would really be as



much concerned with Imperial as with domestic issues, however little Imperial questions might figure in the campaign, for they would indirectly determine who should represent the country in the Imperial Parliament, and ultimately who should be the Imperial Ministers. In this way the economy of the whole scheme would be frustrated or at least seriously deranged. But fancy arrangements of this sort—indirect elections, colleges of electors, and so forth—are wholly out of favour now. American experiences have shown their futility as a counter force to party, and it is generally recognised that if you have democracy in fact, it is merely mischievous to disguise it in form. It is not at all likely that were an Imperial Parliament attempted, the local Parliament would be allowed to nominate its members. Election to the Imperial Parliament will be direct; the peoples of the United Kingdom and the Dominions voting in an election concerned only with Imperial affairs. At any rate, it is to be hoped that the device of holding elections of various descriptions and the Imperial election on the same day will be avoided. There may be mechanical convenience about one long list, but it hopelessly mixes the issues and leaves the average elector the helpless tool of the party agent. Certainly the ordinary Englishman would have no idea where he was, had he, on receiving his ballot

paper, to vote at the same time for members of the County Council, British Parliament and Imperial Parliament. The long array of names would amaze him, and with so handsome a choice before him he would probably put a cross against all the wrong men. It might make very little difference either way, but the theory is that the elector votes for the men of his choice. Even if he did, it is ten to one it would be the choice of his party, for only by taking in with him a marked list of candidates would he ever succeed in voting correctly.

Election to the Imperial Parliament being direct, the Imperial constituency and franchise would have to be settled. In the great diversity of the constituent countries of the British Empire this would be an extremely difficult task, and it is likely that "Reform" questions would never be out of the programme of the Imperial Parliament. A uniform franchise suited to all, and working with even results, would be an unattainable ideal. The choice would be between a common franchise operating very roughly and always generating grievances, and a system of diverse franchises, every constituent country having its own. In the conception of an Imperial Parliament an elector is neither English, Canadian, Scotch nor Australian. All vote simply as British citizens, and a varying franchise would be an anomaly, though not

necessarily fatal, as the experience of the South African Union shows. Numbers, too, would be a difficulty. If representation in Parliament were to be in the same proportion to the electorate as now in the British and Dominion Parliaments, it would be unwieldy and very difficult to work. Large numbers tend to dilatory obstructive and unbusinesslike ways in a deliberative assembly; the very reverse of what is wanted for the conduct of Imperial policy. On the other hand, if the membership is kept down to a small and easily manageable figure, it would be hard on such a colony as Newfoundland which would be left practically a negligible quantity, unless its sparse representation happened always to include a genius or at the least an unusually brilliant mind, which is not likely. No doubt proportionately Newfoundland would come out level with the United Kingdom, South Africa, or any other constituent country, but absolutely her voice would be too small to be heard. The grievance would be mitigated, perhaps remedied, by varying the ratio of representation in favour of the less thickly populated countries, allowing them more members per so many thousand Imperial electors. But this would bring new difficulties of its own, and would leave indefinite opportunity for complaint. Indeed, the whole question what should be the ratio of representa-

tion in the Imperial Parliament, how many electors should be entitled to return a member, would be a thorny one to settle. All these difficulties would arise, and they would be serious, but, after all, they are mechanical and might be got over if the mind of the Empire were set on an Imperial Parliament. They might not be settled satisfactorily; they certainly would not be settled finally: but a way out would be found. The project would not break down on these points.

More serious is the difficulty in the way of personnel arising from the great distances separating one part of the Empire from another. If the venue for the Imperial Parliament were London, and it could hardly be anywhere else, the members of the United Kingdom would have a very great advantage over the members for the distant Dominions. They would be practically on the spot; they would be able to combine other occupations with attendance in the Imperial Parliament; their ordinary life would not be deranged. To the Dominions man, on the other hand, it would mean the abandonment of all his former pursuits, and giving up everything to his Parliamentary work; he would be living neither in his own country nor in England, obviously a great complication to a family man. Travelling expenses would be very heavy, though the burden would

no doubt fall mainly on public funds. But in any case service in the Imperial Parliament must be very expensive to the Dominion member, and it is not likely that salaries would be commensurate. The outcome of these conditions would be that only rich and independent men of leisure or professional politicians would represent the Dominions in the Imperial Parliament. By professional politician is meant a man who lives on his parliamentary salary and has no other serious interests than his political career. This would undoubtedly be the prevailing type in the Imperial Parliament, for the sufficient reason that the number of very rich and leisured men in the Dominions is not large. There are plenty of rich men in these countries, as everyone knows, but they are generally not leisured men. They are usually men of great administrative and business capacity, who have built up or helped to build up immense commercial undertakings, and are now directing them. The man who has the genius for work of that sort and on that scale cannot live without action and is contemptuously impatient of the debate and intrigue that inevitably makes up more than half of parliamentary life in any country and under any conditions. He may go into Parliament to try it, but he seldom sticks to it. If he does, it is often—to speak plainly—in order to be in a position to keep



things politically smooth for the undertaking with which he is connected ; though he generally finds that this can be done better through another whom he can control, or, at the least, effectively influence. Another, but rarer, type of Colonial millionaire does no business, but devotes himself to art. He becomes what used to be called a great patron of the arts, and sometimes, like the famous Mr. Salting from Australia, a connoisseur. For this sort Parliament has even less attraction than for the business man. No doubt there will always be a certain number of men who have made fortunes in the colonies and live in this country, doing some business, but mainly living the life of leisured Englishmen of the upper class. They have their town house and their place in the country : they will be in London during the season, they will shoot in the autumn, and go to Monte Carlo later on. These might wish to enter the Imperial Parliament, if they thought it gave them social prestige : but it is very doubtful if it would. There is no longer much social prestige about the British Parliament in spite of its traditional association with Society. A brand new Imperial Parliament would not have this association at all. In any case, this type would not be a good Dominion representative because he would have lost touch with his country and would probably be unsympathetic with

the Dominion point of view. On the whole, the professional politician will have to man the Imperial Parliament.

Of a different kind is the difficulty that might, and probably would, arise from particularism. Everyone of the Dominions would naturally be desirous to figure prominently in the Parliament of the Empire, and every Dominion member would laudably be anxious to do his utmost for his own Dominion. The representatives of the same Dominion would tend to look at most things from the same point of view, and would tend to act and very likely sit together. It is at least easily conceivable that one Dominion would take a different view of its interests from another, and that little differences would spring up. This would tend to draw closer together the members from the same Dominion and induce them to organise on a local basis. Thus Dominion groups would grow up with regular leaders. This would not necessarily make the Imperial Parliament unworkable, but it certainly would make against its success. Grouping on a particularist basis has no justification in an Imperial Parliament. Cutting right across the main line of objective, it would distract attention and so impede action. It might lead to much worse things, accentuating differences and resulting in division rather than unification. If this seems a pessimistic view, it must be

remembered that the Imperial Parliament would be a very large assembly, and all large assemblies tend to be fissiparous. The tendency indeed can hardly be kept under by any other means than the iron hand of a national party machine, as in the United States. The remedy is then hardly better, if it is not worse, than the disease.

It is also a serious question for the Empire whether an Imperial Parliament would not intensify and even create difficulties between coloured and white British subjects. The colour question is always with us, and is difficult enough without unnecessary emphasis by constitutional machinery. An assembly purporting to represent the whole Empire and actually representing all white British subjects, but excluding all coloured British subjects, would be a perpetual advertisement of the disabilities of colour. It would be an irritating reminder to all educated coloured subjects of their inferior position. It would almost be a challenge to protest. It may be said that they would be in no worse position than they are now. They have no share in the Government of the Empire now, and they would have none then. But they are now only on a level with thousands of white British subjects. The line of demarcation now is not one of colour. But ask all white subjects to send representatives to an assembly which is to govern the Empire,

while you carefully refrain from asking any coloured subjects, and their inferiority becomes obvious. Grant that it is not possible more than tentatively and to a very limited extent to associate coloured subjects in the Government of the Empire, that is not a reason for placarding their disability. A well educated, well born, and intelligent Indian subject knows now that neither India nor the Empire is governed by a popular or representative body. He knows that Parliament does not represent the Empire, but only the United Kingdom. He is not an inhabitant of the United Kingdom; he has no grievance. But what will the same man feel if he sees the South African Boers, who rebelled against the British King, his Emperor of India, and refuse to let Indian fellow subjects of his settle in South Africa, sending representatives to a popular Imperial Parliament from which he is excluded, and for which he is not allowed a vote? The strain on the loyal subject, who in the ordinary course is quite content to leave politics alone, would be great, but what about the other kind, the restless, chattering, agitating Babu? What a theme for his oratory! Nothing could suit his book so well. He now agitates for popular representative Government, and is told it is not compatible with Imperial interests. Set up your Imperial Parliament, and what answer

have you to him then ? Only that he is not fit because he is not white. There have been, we know, Indians in our British Parliament. But such a thing has been too rare to excite opposition. Anyway, it is quite certain that, whatever arrangements of franchise or qualification for membership were made, at most there would not be more than a very small number of coloured members of the Imperial Parliament, and these few would rather emphasise by their sparseness the coloured subjects' inferiority than mitigate it. On the whole, it is most likely that the Imperial franchise would never be given to the coloured peoples. We know what is South African sentiment on the colour question (the Cape coloured franchise notwithstanding) and most whites who have lived in a country of mixed coloured and white peoples agree with it. The colour question would be a running sore in the Imperial Parliament, the despair of Governments, the hope and opportunity of every crank.

It will be argued, no doubt, that similar objections from the coloured subjects' point of view would lie against an Imperial Council from which they were mainly excluded, and against a Referendum which ignored them. But this is an argument on paper. In practice, omission from a small Council of ten or twelve is not on the same plane at all with being omitted from an assembly of many hundreds. Neither



is at all the same thing not to be asked to write an answer to questions put by a Cabinet, as not to be allowed to vote for a representative of the land which you inhabit. In India the Referendum would excite no interest. It would be difficult for the coloured agitator to make capital out of it. It has no spectacular side : it does not lend itself to oratory. The absence of coloured men from a white Parliament can be *seen* ; seen by those who never come within a thousand miles of London. A Cabinet is not seen, and a Referendum is a colder and less obtrusive thing than an election. In India, at any rate, it could never come under the eyes of the people, and it would be really difficult to make even educated Indians understand what a Referendum which they had never come across was. After all, this is confessedly a matter of appearances. The power or impotence of the coloured subject will be just the same either way ; it is a question of what he would notice ; what he would realise.

Last, and most serious, an Imperial Parliament would renew on a much larger scale in a more malignant form all the defects and vices of the old parliamentary system. There is nothing either in Dominion political life or in parliamentary circles at home to justify any hope of a better pattern in an Imperial Parliament. There is no reason to look for any

improvement in personnel: on the other hand there is great reason to expect a much more powerful party Machine. In no country, not even in the United States, would the Machine ever have had so grand an opportunity and so wide a field. The very mechanical difficulties of getting together a large assembly gathered from all quarters of the globe would play irresistibly into the hands of the Machine. Here would be a Paradise indeed, a happy hunting ground, for every known species of political parasite, and probably for some unknown ones which the new opportunity would discover. The swarm would soon become the faithful henchmen of the first man of no conscience and unusual capacity for intrigue. To a certainty we should have our "Bosses."

We are thus left with the proposal of an Imperial Council or Cabinet as the Executive of the Empire drawn from and representing both United Kingdom and Dominions. This does not involve an Imperial Parliament, but the Council might be responsible to the British and the Dominion Parliaments, or it might be responsible to no Parliament, only to the people. An obvious objection to making an Imperial Council responsible to the Parliaments of the Empire is that it would—no less than the Imperial Parliament—involve the Government of the Empire in the train of parliamentary

ills. Indirectly it is true, but none the less, the Council would be in the hands of party. Having to get its acts confirmed by parliamentary sanction, having to go to Parliaments for money, having to get its constructive schemes passed by them, how can it escape anything the parliamentary system involves? The Council would, no doubt, be a more efficient executive instrument for Imperial business than the Cabinet under our present system, but we should still be in the toils of party politics. Imperial questions would be a regular part of the British and Colonial parliamentary programmes; they would be turned into account by Ministry and Opposition as it suited either. But apart from this the multiplicity of Parliaments, whose consent would be necessary to the policy of the Imperial Council, would make government practically impossible.

Mr. Herbert Samuel has suggested in the "Nineteenth Century and After," by way of a beginning—avowedly a transitional arrangement—an Imperial Executive directly representing the Dominions (with the omission of Newfoundland) and including certain British Ministers—Foreign Secretary, Secretary of State for War, First Lord of the Admiralty, and possibly others. This Imperial Cabinet is to submit its proposals to an advisory Assembly, which, having shaped them according to its

discretion, will forward them as amended to the British and Dominion Parliaments to accept, amend, or reject. It is perhaps not a defect in a tentative arrangement that it abounds in anomalies, nor is it a final objection that it does not result in an Imperial Government in any true or complete sense. It does not profess to do this, but only to make the way easier thereto. It is more serious, if the position taken up in this book as to the parliamentary and party system has any justification, that the arrangement leaves all power, Imperial as completely as local, in the various Parliaments of the Empire. Also, it is difficult to understand how Imperial business is to be got through at all, if every proposal of the Imperial Cabinet has first to be shaped by an advisory Assembly, and then has to run the gauntlet of some five Parliaments, every one of which may amend them as it pleases, or reject them. The amendments of the different Parliaments might be contradictory. Differences between the British or a Dominion Parliament and the Imperial Cabinet or Assembly would be got over, we are told, by the local Parliament taking the bill into its own hands, and passing it in the shape it desired. But that could be done only in the case of a proposal which did not apply equally to the whole Empire ; but most items of Imperial policy would. These would break down en-

tirely if the United Kingdom or a Dominion stood out of them. In the event of such a breakdown would there be a reversion to Imperial Government as we have it now? That would, at any rate, be a way out. Mr. Samuel's suggestion may be feasible as an experiment towards a more excellent way, but only so. The plan might fail but still have been a useful experiment.

Lastly, let us consider an Imperial Council not responsible to any Parliament, but responsible to the King and the people, whom it must consult by Referendum. This plan at least delivers us from the vices and weaknesses of Parliaments; neither can it be the sport or the prey of party in at all the same sense as an elected body is and always must be. Party spirit and organisation could, no doubt, be brought to bear on a Referendum, but only in a much modified and less virulent form. Then, the close association of Cabinet life would neutralise particularist tendencies and induce a community of view infinitely more difficult to obtain in a large representative assembly. Meeting day by day round a table, members of the Imperial Council would get to know one another so well that a sympathetic understanding would be easy; and this would leave the way clear to a common appreciation of the common object, the good government of the whole Empire. In such conditions differences springing



from apparent discrepancy in regional or local interests might be trusted to shrink into practical insignificance. Situations would be made the best of, not the worse; difficulties would be minimised rather than magnified. It would be no one's object to make trouble or to exacerbate such difficulties as were there. No doubt some of the benefits of opposition and criticism would be absent as well as the mischief. But there would be the criticism of the Press and of the public, which even now Governments are much more concerned about than the criticism of the parliamentary Opposition—with this difference, that neither newspapers nor citizens would then feel bound to attack or defend the Government (according to the point of view) right or wrong. It is probable that the general tendency would be rather to criticism and dissatisfaction, for it is natural to us to be discontented with those who look after our affairs, but the grumbling should be more intelligent than it is now, for it would not be machine made. Even under a coalition Ministry, which is both-party, not at all the same thing as non-party government, criticism of the Government has been more intelligent, more substantial than the regular trouncing of Ministers by the party not in office.

How far any constitutional arrangement will assist independence in the Government and

yet avoid irresponsibility, only trial can show ; and even long trial may leave it doubtful what is the result produced, and still more doubtful what produces it. Men's judgments are determined, or, at any rate, strongly inclined by their temperaments. One man will by nature always suspect irresponsibility or defective accountability to the people in the national Executive ; another will see always want of independence. Each will lay the mischief he perceives to the charge of the constitution. Different minds will, of course, see different dangers in the plan here proposed. That plan admittedly goes on the belief that want of independence is a more serious evil in Imperial Government than unaccountability ; though it is not admitted that the proposed arrangement would induce an irresponsible temper in the Executive.

The departments here assigned to the Imperial Council cover the distinctively Imperial side of the work of the British and Dominion Governments.

The Crown Colonies should be under the Imperial Council. They are now administered directly from the centre by what is regarded as the Imperial Government ; so it would be only consistent that a really Imperial administration should take over these Colonies. It is not likely they would object. They are

inclined to think they are interfered with too much from home; so they would hardly be sorry to escape from parliamentary meddling. Sometimes, no doubt, a Crown Colony grievance is ventilated in Parliament; but it is generally a grievance of the minor sort, something personal, that is thus advertised. Most Crown Colonies might be willing to give up that boon for the assurance that Parliament would not be able to thwart an exceptionally enterprising Colonial Minister or Governor's plans for the colony. At the same time there are objections from the point of view of the Imperial Council. Much of the Crown Colony business is not really Imperial; it is indeed very local. In these communities the white population is not large, and their affairs are on a comparatively small scale. The appointment of their judges and magistrates is a very different kind of business from that which should properly occupy an Imperial Council. The less the Council had to do with patronage, the better. They would have no party to manage and humour, so they could get on without having ribands and stars to bestow, and the paid appointments necessarily in their control would be numerous enough without adding any that could safely be left in the hands of parliamentary Ministers. However, this Crown Colony patronage would in fact be managed entirely by permanent

Civil Servants of the Colonial Office. It need not trouble the Colonial Minister much, and the Imperial Council almost not at all.

Certainly the development of tropical countries, with all their natural wonders and unsounded resources, their diversities of race with all the complicated problems attendant, the government of large native populations by a handful of Englishmen, mostly young; all this is very much work for an Imperial Government. Crown Colonies have not always received "at home" the consideration they deserve. What does the average man and woman over here know about them, or care? It would only be right that, if there were an Imperial Council, these most remarkable possessions, more characteristic than any other of British rule, and best illustrating the peculiarity of our Empire, should be the special care, perhaps the favourite ward, of the Imperial Government.

Lastly, there is the question of trade. Should there be a distinctively Trade Member of Council? Trade is very certainly an Imperial matter; the Empire's existence largely depends on trade: trade plays a large, indeed the largest part, in the intercourse between this country and the self-governing Dominions, and is an important element in British relations with foreign countries. Government cannot avoid

having constant touch with trade. In the United Kingdom it has much less close touch with it than in many other countries; here Government does not directly stimulate trade; it does not assist the private trader in competition with foreign rivals; it does not control or interfere with railways and steamship companies in the interest of British trade: it does not subsidise them with that object, nor assist new and pioneer ventures. The assumption has prevailed here that Government can help trade best by leaving it alone. It could not help intervening when it became a question of duties on foreign imports, but by putting duties only on the smallest number of articles possible, it kept this intervention within the narrowest limits. Most of the Dominion Governments have taken a very different view of their duty, adopting a policy much more akin to that of the Continental powers, in commercial methods as well as in the matter of duties. So far as trade is concerned every self-governing unit of the Empire has been regarded and has acted as a separate state, putting on or taking off duties against other parts of the Empire or foreign powers as it liked, with a view solely to its own private interests without any regard to the interests of the Empire as a whole.

The Dominions being integral parts of the



same polity with the United Kingdom, at first sight it would seem natural that there should be but one tariff for the whole Empire fixed by a central authority fairly representing every country within the Empire. Such an authority has not yet existed, and to this mainly perhaps is due the very strong feeling shown by the Dominions, especially Canada, when there has been any attempt, or appearance of an attempt, by the British Government to question the colonial claim to settle all questions of tariff in their own way. The Dominion has felt that it was an attempt of one part of the Empire to coerce another part, both being as to the matter in hand equal. There could be no such feeling in the case of intervention by a Central Government in which the Dominion affected had a voice in the same way as the other states making up the Empire. Whatever was done by the Imperial Government would then in part be the Dominion's own doing as well. There would not be the same opportunity for friction. Logically, of course, the claim of one part of an Empire or of one unit of a Commonwealth to make its own tariff arrangements with a foreign power independently of the Commonwealth as a whole is untenable. It is a contradiction in terms. Nothing on any ground of political theory can be said in excuse of an arrangement by which certain foreign

Powers allow any Dominion to withdraw separately from a treaty made with that Power by the British Government. It is sheer negation of unity. Still the Empire goes on, though that does not prove that everything has been for the best. This extraordinary state of things grew up partly by neglect of the United Kingdom consequent on the belief that the Colonies would soon drop off, so that it did not matter either way ; partly from a total failure to understand the Colonies' economic position. Neither United Kingdom nor colony considered the commercial needs of the other. Indeed by adopting a system of Free Imports the British Government made anything in the way of an Imperial trade policy impossible. Such a system might suit a highly organised country, commercially and industrially advanced, but it could not suit a young community that had to make its own way. For revenue purpose the Colonies were obliged to depend mainly on import duties. Could the Colonies have got on with a tariff against the foreigner, but with none against the United Kingdom ? For the imposition of duties on British goods makes the really bizarre feature in the present arrangement. (Mr. Chamberlain seemed to feel the falsity of the position when replying to the Lancashire cotton deputation, though clearly if the Dominions are to be free to protect their manufactures by

a tariff against British goods, it would be wholly inequitable to prevent India doing the same because India is not governed by a Parliament.) Anyway, the Colonies thought they could not get on without Protection against Britain, and the home Government followed the line of least resistance. Matters just drifted. The right way would have been to take the Colonies entirely into our confidence, treat them as equals, and with them try to make an arrangement, which, with a little give and take on both sides, would have suited both at least fairly well and saved the position of the Empire at the same time. That, it may be answered, is very nice on paper ; but how could it be done ? But the point is there was never even an attempt to do it. To show how it could be done is for practical statesmen, not for the writer of a tract. It has been suggested that there should be a general tariff against foreign imports uniform throughout the Empire : which would leave United Kingdom and Colonies alike free to discriminate in favour of our present allies, and still more in favour of one another. Thus the duties against imports from other foreign countries would be higher than the duties against allied imports, and much higher than those against any part of the British Empire. Such an arrangement might, it seems, meet the need ; but in such matters details are everything ;

it is a question of how it would work out. However, we are now all agreed that things might have been managed better than they were ; that leaving them to drift was not such heaven-sent wisdom as economic pundits used to tell us it was ; and that a new start is desirable. This cannot be made without a new Imperial Government.

In present circumstances no doubt an Imperial Council could hardly touch trade. But this war has suggested to many formerly opposed to the idea that the Empire should present a common front to the rest of the world in trade policy ; that parts of the same Empire ought not to be mere competitors one with another as though they were foreign countries. Without saying that Imperial Preference is a condition precedent of Imperial unity because the Dominions would think a share in the control of foreign and all Imperial policy not return enough without trade preference for a greatly increased contribution to Imperial funds, the adoption of a Preferential system would certainly facilitate closer union ; and at present the trend is all that way. In such an event the Imperial Council would naturally have much to do with trade. One of its members would be Imperial Trade Minister with a trade department for the Empire. But the present Board of Trade,

being concerned with domestic interests, would not be taken over.

Finance in connection with the Imperial Council will be treated in a separate chapter.



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## CHAPTER VI

### THE IMPERIAL COUNCIL AND DEMOCRACY

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THE idea of taking out of the hands of Parliament and its purview very important departments of Government and entrusting them to a Council formally appointed by the King will be a stumbling block to many simply because of its unexpectedness. Custom has hallowed the supremacy of Parliament to a certain conservative type of mind, even though it be much dissatisfied with this supremacy in practice and loudly says so. Others, not merely conservative, will shrink from the idea on the ground of caution. They will argue that many bad things are best left alone for fear of worse—not an heroic position, certainly, but conceivably not unwise. Yet on balance are the dangers of such a change so great as the dangers of leaving things as they are? Many years ago Lecky, who certainly had not a rash or even an heroic temperament, was convinced that the safety of the State would compel a modification of parliamentary

supremacy. He thought we should have to limit the powers of Parliament by a written constitution. Already the sacro-sanctity of the un-writtenness, if one may so say, of the constitution has been violated by the Parliament Act, which defined the powers of one House of the Legislature. The proposal here made would be the substitution in part of a written for the un-written constitution. It would meet some of the dangers pointed out by Lecky, and could hardly do other than make for stability in the management of the business of the Empire. If the cautious objector will test his first impression by serious examination of the plan, and try to envisage its results, he may be inclined to waive opposition, even if he is not converted to more than benevolent neutrality. It is not he that should find great difficulty in accepting it. And the mere Conservative, with whom Parliament and its omnipotence was bred in the bone, may be soothed by finding that Parliament will be little changed outwardly. He will not miss much. He does not think Parliament perfect, and so long as it goes on at all he may not be very sorry to see some of the work done better by other men. It may even seem to him in the way of reconciliation between two incompatibles, in both of which he believes, the necessity of Parliament and the good Government of the Empire.

Then there are those who will say the proposal is anti-democratic; a stock objection, always ready to hand, or rather to mouth, with those who condemn first and think afterwards, if they think at all. Others however may make the point seriously, perhaps feeling that such a plan would in more than one way make for good Imperial administration, but at the same time might weaken the power of the people. Regarding democracy as the greatest of ideals, they could not accept even good government at the price of encroachment on the democratic principle. They would probably see that to charge a scheme with being anti-democratic or undemocratic does not prove it to be wrong; that with some this charge would have no weight at all; still for them with their principles—right or wrong—this charge, if it can be proved, is final.

This is a less difficult attitude to deal with than the cautious or the Conservative attitude, for it rests not on temperament but on argument from merits. It is not a feeling; it can be met.

In the first place democrats who do not regard the teaching of history as irrelevant may be reminded that in the past democracy has fulfilled itself much more successfully through the leadership of one or a few men of action than through a representative assembly. A multitude cannot act for itself; it can only

act through a much smaller number, and very often most effectually through one man. A numerous representative assembly is no more able to act than the multitude it is supposed to represent; it has to leave action to a small committee, who, being mainly chosen from the assembly itself, are not primarily men of action. This executive will naturally either be the servant of the assembly and not of the people, or it will be the servant of the people and will ignore the assembly. In other words, from the democratic point of view, if the assembly is strong, it merely comes between the people and the executive: if the executive is strong and carries out the wishes of the people, the assembly becomes superfluous, and that which is or has become superfluous can seldom be left in an organism without harm to the parts still in vigorous action. The most effective and successful representative Government has not been democratic; and when it has become democratic it has generally declined, and the decline has not infrequently ended in its decease. This experience is usually cited in evidence of the mischiefs wrought by democracy; but it may just as well prove the harm done by representative assemblies. The two have not got on well together, though both take their stand on "freedom"; both take it as their trade mark. But it is no more true or more relevant

to say that democracy is incompatible with parliamentary Government than that parliamentary Government is incompatible with democracy. Possibly "incompatible" is too strong a word, but, at any rate, neither can attain its full stature or fully "express itself" except at the expense of the other. This is a commonplace of political observation; it meets one at every turn in ancient, especially Roman, history, and many modern countries illustrate the fact quite as strikingly.

Nor is the antagonism between democracy and Parliament, sometimes open, sometimes veiled, difficult to account for. It is the truth that the electorate distrust the elected body, a paradoxical position following on the discovery by the electors that those whom they have elected do not really represent them. They choose their members on the faith of a number of representations, which these gentlemen when they get into the Chamber find themselves unable to justify. There is no need to ascribe to them bad faith; many of them honestly believe that they will satisfy the expectations they have aroused and intend to do so. But the electors only know that certain things were promised to them, which they have not received; and in their resentment they are not much inclined to make distinction between bad faith and honest but empty intention.



It is equally unsatisfactory to them either way, and a feeling of general distrust of Parliament remains. This distrust is not mitigated but rather embittered by the reminder sometimes administered by the local member on his defence that he had not promised anything; he had only said he would do his best to get this or that. It is an unfortunate plea, for, however good in logic, it makes the elector feel that he has not only been disappointed, but done. In his mind, if not openly, he charges his member with cunningly choosing words which, while they would not commit him, would be taken by any plain man to be a promise.

Also, the electorate come to observe that when a man enters the Chamber, no matter how truly he has seemed to be one of them, in no long time he comes to see things in a House of Commons light; he takes his tone from Parliament, and not from the people. This they do not like. Also the more observant of them perceive that even as a piece of machinery the House of Commons is faulty in its representation of the people.

There can, to begin with, be no just representation except on a proportional system; as the electoral commission has lately found. The rule of the absolute majority, even of a true majority, is not properly representative, though it may be the most convenient, some would say the only, practicable plan.

This radical, if inevitable, vice in the representative character of the House as it is, is greatly exaggerated by the fallacies of distribution. Everyone knows that many places have too many members for the number of electors, others too few. It might happen that a minority of the electors returned a majority of the whole House; and the views of the minority, not of the majority, of the people be given effect to. Whatever the result, this is flatly anti-democratic. This is an extreme case, no doubt, and not likely to happen; but it always happens and must happen that anomalies of distribution prevent the House of Commons being a fair abstract of the nation.

The crowning paradox is that representative Government would work less well than it does if representation were fair. To be fair, parties must stand to each other in the House in the same proportion as the votes cast for the various parties in the election. If one party gets one third more votes than the other, it should have one third more members, neither more nor less, in the House. But this is not what happens. The party that gets a majority returns a balance of members over the other party greater than the difference in the votes cast justifies.

Take the figures at some general elections when the number of members returned unopposed were comparatively few.

In 1892 votes were cast as follows :—

Liberal, Labour and Nationalist . 2,293,041

Unionist . . . . . 2,056,737

Liberal, Labour and Nationalist  
majority in House of Commons . 40

The true majority according to the votes  
cast would have been 36.

In 1906 :—

Liberal, Labour and Nationalist . 3,168,595

Unionist . . . . . 2,463,608

Liberal, Labour and Nationalist  
majority in House of Commons . 356

This should have been 84.

In January, 1910 :—

Liberal, Labour and Nationalist . 3,539,517

Unionist . . . . . 3,127,887

Liberal, Labour and Nationalist  
majority in House of Commons . 124

This would work out at 42.

Thus, if representation in Parliament agreed with the facts in the country, a strong Government—one resting on a large majority—would seldom ensue.

Proportional representation should go far, it is true, to correct this fallacy, but probably with the result that majorities would not be large enough to make any Government secure.

It is also a true democratic objection to Parliament that it does not change with changes in public opinion. After a general election the successful party preponderates in the House more than it does in the country, and usually this difference between House and country widens as time goes on. Bye-elections will correct this to a certain extent, but there may be no bye-elections, or very few; and in any event bye-elections will not suffice to bring the House into line with the country if there has been a general change of public feeling. No-one will question that many Ministries have remained in office for a considerable time after they have lost the confidence of the country, whether Ministers had realised the fact or not. In this way measures may be passed which, if they had been referred to the people, would have been rejected. The House of Commons does not mirror public opinion. This may or not be an objection on merits. If at an election the people chose trustees to carry on for them the business of the country until the next election and had no further concern until members came to render an account of their stewardship, the objections we have been discussing would not apply. But this is not the theory that now obtains; it is emphatically not the understanding on which members are elected or on which they profess to act. From

a democratic point of view these objections to the House as a representative body are all valid. They, at the least, make it more than arguable that on a system of Referendum the whole people would be much more accurately represented than they are under the parliamentary system.

It is true that the Referendum here contemplated gives the country only a disposing power ; it does not give power to propose anything. But on matters of foreign policy, Army and Navy, in short all Imperial questions, with which alone we are concerned here, the country has never wanted to propose, and certainly never has proposed. The thought required for initiative in these departments is not possible to a great multitude of people of whom nearly all are pre-occupied with private business of their own. They wisely prefer to let experts propose, but they do require, or should require, that these shall be experts in fact as well as in name. As it is, they leave initiative in these things to the Government, but not with complete confidence, for they are aware that Ministers like themselves have their pre-occupations, which take their mind off their proper work of government. No statesman that has to look after the fortunes of his party as well as the fortunes of his country can give undivided attention to his Ministerial work. He will frequently



suffer from the divided mind that so often wrecks action. The divided mind is as fatal in life as it is in all games.

The great, indeed the overwhelming advantage, a Referendum has over an election, is that it puts before the nation one issue at a time. It does not mix up personal with public issues; nor one political issue with another. An election not only invariably does this but does it in the worst possible way. The personal side of politics counts for a great deal more than policy. Unavoidably, seeing how much more a person means to ninety-nine people out of a hundred than a plan. A person is a living thing, a policy is an abstraction. Policy gets its interest and reality for most people from the person who advocates it. This preference for persons over policy is sound enough in itself, for in the long run persons are more important than policy. If the electorate were avowedly asked to choose persons, leaving policy to those whom they have chosen, it would be in itself a more reasonable plan than that now in vogue. A multitude has a better instinct for a man than for a policy. But party would never give such a system a fair chance. The people would not in fact choose at all; the persons to be supported would be selected for them by the Machine, and very sordid grounds of selection would soon prevail. The assumption that the people

choose their candidates on political grounds and give a considered judgment on policy, has its uses. It tends to prevent corruption and keeps down the element of private interest. On the other hand, the crossing of the personal and political interest always gravely confuses the issue. It is impossible to know how far a constituency is supporting a policy or supporting a man. It frequently happens that a constituency returns a particular man time after time, but as soon as he drops out promptly returns a candidate of exactly the opposite policy. It is then clear that the constituency hitherto had been choosing their man but not their policy. An election does not give the chance of dealing with the personal and political issues separately. The converse also happens. A man is put forward because of his policy, whom many of his own party dislike and sometimes regard as unfit to be in Parliament. A conscientious elector is then placed in a painful position. Is he to help an unworthy man to get into Parliament and so lower the whole tone of public life? Is he, on the other hand, to withhold his support from the policy he believes to be right? Is he to support a policy he believes to be wrong because the candidate who favours it is an excellent man in contrast to the man representing the policy he believes to be right? The elector is in a cleft stick.

He must support either a bad man or a bad policy ; or he must do nothing. A most unsatisfactory way out however he decides.

There is also the personal interest of electors. This cannot be entirely eliminated, and very certainly is not. In every election there are always electors who have a personal interest in the success of one side or another. It may not be corrupt—or not consciously corrupt ; it may simply be that the adoption of a certain measure will be favourable to his fortunes without any doubtful conduct on his part. In such a case very few would have the independence to put public interest first. Similarly local interests with a good many will outweigh Imperial interests.

And what a clash of purely political issues ! Foreign policy, Colonial questions, Home Rule, Tariff Reform, Social Reform, Socialism, Trade Union questions, Army, Navy Finance, Education, Church, the Budget, House of Lords. This is the farrago that is put before the elector ; and our constitutional authorities gravely assume that every one of our voting millions gives a considered and independent judgment on every one of these questions. How many have the time to do anything of the kind ? How many the will ? How many the ability ? Not only, it must be remembered, is this mass thrown at the country pell mell, without any attempt

at arrangement, but it is presented exclusively by advocates, and not very scrupulously by them. The political advocate is restrained by none of the customs and courtesies that keep the barrister within bounds. He has no bench to respect, and no Bar to regard. How can the elector tackle these questions? To take them seriously he should have followed their previous history carefully; he should read what the best papers on both sides say: he should hear both candidates, and go to as many meetings on one side as on the other. Having done all this by way of preparation, he should calmly think over the whole matter with as little prejudice as possible before giving his vote. Not one will even attempt to do this; and, to tell the truth, he would be a fool if he did. This is not a question of democracy. It is almost as impossible for highly educated men, who have an occupation of their own, to do this as it is for working men. The ordinary elector knows he would be hopelessly lost in the maze of issues, and trusts himself to the one tangible thing—his party.

Thus none can say what he really thinks on any question. If he did try to think them out for himself, he would almost certainly find that he agreed with his party on some things and not on others. It would be the most natural thing in the world for him to agree

with one side, say, on foreign policy, with the other on social reform. But he has to give a block vote. What happens is that the voters who think for themselves vote for the man who agrees with them in the particular issue they care most about. The other questions they "lump." At most elections one question is to the fore, and there is generally some sort of a national judgment on that. This simplifies matters, but it means the neglect of nearly the whole field of politics, and especially of Imperial issues: for it is generally on some home question that controversy is acute, and it is the controversial matters that attract. If you take the line that the bulk of the people are totally unable to judge on most political issues, and therefore it is no loss but rather a gain that these issues are put to them in a way that makes it impossible for them to express an opinion, you can rationally defend the present system. But on democratic grounds it is impossible to defend it. If a nation is a democracy, it is simply fraud to put national issues to the people in such a way that they cannot possibly make head or tail of them. It is bad, too, that they should have no opportunity to educate themselves on matters of Imperial policy. Give them the chance of expressing an opinion on a definite Imperial matter unmixed with any other issue and they will rise to their responsi-



bility as citizens, as they cannot do when they know of no choice but between one man or another and one party or another.

It is clear that a Referendum avoids all these objections; for it puts but one issue before the nation, not crossed with other political issues nor complicated with personal considerations. No doubt an issue might be submitted which affected the private interests of some of the electors, and in that case votes might be given on private grounds as now at an election. This is perhaps less likely to happen in the Imperial departments, as to which alone a Referendum is proposed here, and in any case the proportion of the whole electorate affected personally will be far too small to decide the issue. A group or section may determine a local election, but to turn a vote of the whole nation is a very different matter. Dockyard constituencies, it is well-known, often determine their election on a question of dockyard wages; but if this question of wages were included in a general naval estimate submitted to the whole country, the dockyard vote could hardly be a determining factor.

Under a Referendum no-one would be compelled to sacrifice one conviction to save another. The hard case of the Tariff Reforming Home Ruler or the Unionist Free Trader could not happen. Nor would the elector who subscribed to neither

regular party be shut out, as he usually is now. The Socialist, for instance, has in most places to put up with a Hobson's choice between a Conservative or a Liberal. Under a Referendum he would record his vote on the immediate issue like anybody else, and count for as much. There are others very different from the Socialists, who are so much aloof from party politics that now they do not care to vote at all. These would have their chance and would no doubt record their vote conscientiously. And no-one could question that the result of a Referendum showed the view of the nation so far as it went. There could be no fallacies of distribution or representation. True, it would not be possible to compel people to vote, and the total number of answers recorded might fall far short of the total electorate. But we are in that case now: we should be no worse off. If fewer voted on a Referendum than now at an election, it would only mean the weakening of party pressure—hardly a thing to lament. There would at least be a much stronger presumption that the person who did vote on a Referendum voted on merits, because he took more interest in the question, than when he voted for a party candidate at an election.

When the adoption of the Referendum was before the country at the election of December, 1910, it was urged that it would bring in its

train just the same party business as the election of a candidate. There would be meetings, demonstrations, canvassing; the whole force of party machinery would be turned on precisely as now; the wire-puller would be as busy as ever.

The proposal then was to add the Referendum to the present system unmodified, simply as a further test of public opinion. The questions referred to would be the same as those which had been occupying party controversy for many months and had become the commonplaces of Parliament and platform. So that the matter would be referred to the people in a complete party setting and the party machinery could be trained on to a nicety. In these circumstances it is likely that the result of a Referendum would be much affected by party influence. But even so it can hardly be, as was claimed by opponents of the Referendum, that its use would make no difference at all, leading to precisely the same result as would a general election; for had this been the conviction even of those who put it forward, they would have cared very little whether the Referendum were adopted or not. If it could make no difference to the result, what did it matter to them if it was adopted? One must credit any man with intelligence enough not to be much excited in opposition to that which he knows will make

no difference. One side being enthusiastic in favour of the Referendum and the other strenuously opposed to it, it is a safe inference that both sides thought that it might, probably would, produce a result differing from that of a general election. Obviously one side expected it to tell in their favour: the other feared it might tell against them. Very reasonably. Even with all the buzz of party around him the elector would find it a very different thing quietly to answer a written question, detached from and not crossed by any other question, from giving a vote for this man or that with every kind of local association thrown in. A great many would feel that answering "yes" or "no" to a plain question was a more deliberate affair than putting a cross to a name. Moreover, if at heart he did not agree with the majority of his party, he would feel that taking a non-party view on one question was not at all the same thing as voting for the opposition candidate, who, if he got in, would sit for years to oppose the party on all sorts of other questions as well as that the elector was voting on. Independent judgment would be vastly easier, and the power of the Machine accordingly less.

Under the plan here proposed the Reference would be exclusively to matters not within the cognisance of Parliament, and having no

common ground with the questions occupying election campaigns. The Referendum would not take place in a party atmosphere. Foreign, naval and military matters, freed from contact with ordinary party politics, would not engender any great heat. There would no doubt be meetings and plenty of written matter in connection with the Referendum, and there should be. Every reasonable means would be used to educate the people on the issues, and to get them to think before they voted. But meetings without a candidate and the background of an opposition would give little opportunity for the "enthusiasm" loved of the wire-puller, and would have small attraction for the rowdy. They would probably be dull affairs, but if they led a few to think rather than many to shout they would be an improvement on most election meetings. Propagandist societies of different kinds might organise meetings in order to influence electors towards their way of thinking. In this way organised influence could be brought to bear. Neither could the great political parties be prevented from holding meetings, if they would, though it would be improper for them to do it, the question not being within the purview of Parliament. It would be a scandal deliberately to try to introduce party into Imperial policy, the Imperial Council being a non-party body. Whether this would



prevent it being done is not certain. But the number of electors that go to meetings is proportionately few, and the number who are influenced by what they hear there fewer. There would be no question of pulling down or setting up a Government, no Ins and no Outs, and without that the savour strength or sting of party is gone.

It may be a question whether canvassing in connection with the Referendum should be allowed. To stop it would be difficult, yet so much mischief is done by canvassing that it might be worth while to prohibit it, which would at least very sensibly abate the nuisance. What is stated in writing matters but little; it is fixed, it can be seen by all sides and can be answered. It is much the same with what is said at a public meeting. But what is said by canvassers cannot be traced and can never be overtaken, an advantage which the canvasser, female not less than male, educated as well as uneducated, is well aware of and knows how to turn to the utmost account. The misrepresentation and exaggeration, to use no severer term, that goes on in house-to-house canvassing is appalling. Excellent people when they turn canvassers are often so much carried away by their anxiety to help their man and damage the other fellow that they literally do not know what they are saying. Repeat it

to them six months after the election and they will promptly deny they ever said anything of the kind. The denial is quite honest. They truly cannot believe they did say it.

At any rate when Imperial policy is in issue the public ought to be protected against this sort of thing. We must not have the work of the Imperial Council bedevilled by such mischief makers, whether silly women or wicked men, or contrariwise, or both.

Sometimes it is asked: Is the mass of the electorate fit to give a direct judgment on specific questions of policy? What! Can a democrat admit such a doubt? Well, he will not in general terms. Ask him whether he really thinks that the mass of the people are competent to decide on the innumerable grave questions that go to the government of a country, and he will either answer roundly that he does not, or that they must be allowed to express an opinion in order that they may become competent. They can be educated into competence in no other way. But when you suggest to him that the people instead of choosing representatives should themselves answer particular political questions he often falters. This shows that he does not think that the introduction of the Referendum would leave things practically as they are now, and that he has doubts after all of the entire political fitness of the masses.

He evidently doubts if it is not putting on them a greater political strain than they ought to be expected to bear. Dialectically such a position is not tenable for a democrat; but none the less there may be a something in it. It must be faced. The question really is this: Can the bulk of the electors be trusted to give an independent answer to a public question affecting them personally? Can any class? If it were referred to income-tax payers with income from £1,000 to £400 a year, or from £400 to £200 a year, whether incomes within those limits should be tax free, how would most of them answer? What would a Referendum on the point show? Suppose it were referred to the people whether old age pensions should be quadrupled at a stroke, or the whole of the insurance contribution be paid by the employer? It cannot honestly be questioned that it would be easier for the elector to vote in favour of proposals of this kind, benefiting him at the expense of others, on a Referendum than now it is to get his candidate to do it for him. The intervention of Parliament is operative to moderate excessive proposals of this class because most of the members would personally suffer if they were carried. They are not in the position of the larger number of electors, who would immediately gain. It is not reasonable to expect the average man to take very

long views ; to expect him to see that what is his immediate gain may be his ultimate greater loss ; that his gain is at the public expense. There are very few of any class who refuse the chance of a personal gain regularly authorised by the community. It is so easy to be persuaded that a public measure which is good for oneself is good for everybody. We must expect that proposals of great present advantage to the bulk of the electors will be accepted if referred to them, though it may be to the injury of the community. Therefore, doubtful proposals of that kind ought not to be Referred ; and few Governments would be likely to do it. One may paint lurid pictures of a demagogue giant proposing that all property should be confiscated and distributed at once amongst the working classes. The people might pass it, and ruin would follow. But it is easy to imagine possibilities which would bring any system or any nation to grief. This is, on the whole, a reasonable country, and while it is certain that public money will be used more and more to improve the lot of the poorer people, it is likely that the Executive, whatever its form, will see that wild cat proposals are not Referred.

Certainly an Imperial Council could be trusted not to run idle risks with the Referendum, though there is no reason to fear the judgment

of the country on general Imperial questions. For patriotism and Imperial outlook the public can be trusted quite as well as Parliament, perhaps a little better. During the war the country has been steadily in front of Parliament. There is no evidence to justify the fear that has been expressed that the country on a Referendum would habitually vote for sweeping reduction of the Army and supplies. On the contrary, the public is always ready for more expenditure on the Navy. On matters of defence the bulk of the people are sound. They want their King to be well served and the Empire to be strong. They are content so long as they believe that the Government of the Empire is in capable hands and conducted by single-minded men. Little Englanders, pacifists, internationalists, and so forth make some noise, but the Referendum would soon show their smallness. At the same time it would curb any tendency to extravagant jingoism. If this is mainly surmise, experience, so far as we have had it, goes to show that the Referendum is, on the whole, a moderating influence.



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## CHAPTER VII

### THE KING AND THE COUNCIL

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THE Crown would not only be a highly important factor in the working of this scheme of Imperial government but would be almost necessary to its existence. The Crown would be the unifying piece, locking the whole machine together. Without the Crown it would be likely soon to fall to pieces. In a republic of any kind such a scheme would be very difficult to work. If the Imperial Council were elected, the curse of party would come in. If the President alone were elected, and he appointed the members of the Council, party would have an opening almost as great. There would be no authority to whom the whole people could look as equally representing all and equally outside and above all; there would be much more room for local jealousy. The United States have got on so far, it is true, with an elected President, but not the most enthusiastic American would claim that they had also escaped the curse of party.

But could any elected magistrate keep together the widely distant and deeply differing constituent countries of the British Empire? Nationalist independence would rebel against authority sprung from a merely equal constituent state. Canada would hardly submit to a President hailing from Australia. The King is one thing: a Magistrate elected by people no better than themselves quite another. The historic claim of the British Crown puts the Sovereign in a unique position which every colony and dependency can recognise and admit without difficulty or reservation. The King stands in the same relation to all, equally above and equally essential to all.

And in the eyes of the people the King is more than a symbol of Imperial Unity and much more than "First Magistrate of the Realm." The cheap commonplace, ever on the lips of the clever sciolist anxious to be thought modern, that the Divine Right of Kingship is exploded, obsolete, has itself become obsolete. Nothing could be more alien from the popular feeling for Royalty in this country to-day than those threadbare Whig phrases which with portentous iteration laid down that the Crown was the creation of Parliament and the King nothing but a chief magistrate. Puritan and eighteenth century Whig sermons on this text have in this day fully as antiquated a ring as Caroline

exhortations to passive obedience. In later times, too,—in the Victorian reign of the Liberal saints—even Bagehot sounds curiously out of date, when he says “At this moment, though the dogma of hereditary right has been confuted for ages, though it has been laughed at for ages, though Parliaments have condemned it . . . . the tenet still lives in ordinary minds.” Condemned by Parliaments. How awful! What does the public care for that condemnation to-day? It is difficult not to smile at the complacent superiority that dismisses as “ordinary” the mind that can accept what Bagehot has rejected. Put “dogma of God” for “dogma of hereditary right” and the whole sentence has the cocksure ring of the smug young atheist, the clever youth, who used to flourish in Mechanics’ Institutes in mid-Victorian days. No doubt this people that “knoweth not the law” (not being Whigs) are accursed, but the fact remains that for them Divinity still does hedge a King. The main body of English people have never been touched by these Whig doctrines: and Irish, Welsh, and Scotch no more. An Act of Parliament might define a king to be something else, as it might define a horse to be a cow; but for the bulk of the people Acts might come and go; the King remains a King. These doctrines were handy to justify a successful

aristocratic intrigue and became fashionable amongst intellectuals, and later they fitted in very well with the materialist Manchester views that came to permeate the middle classes. But the prayer book and the Coronation service in particular have embodied the national and popular conception of Kingship better than Acts of Parliament. To the common people the King is, as he has ever been, the Lord's Anointed. Without analysing their feelings, without thought of expressing their sense in precise terms, without any conscious theology they think of the King as by religious sanction a person apart from other men. If they did not, there would certainly be no King at all. What is a "symbol of national unity" to the work girl, the field-labourer, the ordinary London working-man, or, for that matter, to the farmer or to the middle class merchant's wife? What is a "Chief Magistrate" to them? So far as he meant anything, it would be something unpleasant. What remains of the British King, if he is stripped of all religious investiture? He does not govern, he does not command armies, he has to accept every Act his advisers choose to impose upon him. Without the touch of something more than human, the King of England dwindles to a shade. The discrepancy between regal facts and regal forms would gape too wide for the people not

to note it. There are those to whom, as to the Whigs before, the Crown is a useful fiction. But let the nation as a whole be seized of the idea that the Crown is a fiction, and its usefulness will not save it. To the unsophisticated mind a King must be something real or nothing at all. The people now have the instinct that the King is sacro-sanct. His office, being from above, makes him really different from other people, whatever his personality, though by faithlessness to his trust he can forfeit his divine commission. There is an "intellectual" type that cannot believe that the crowd has any real enthusiasm for Royalty. But every newspaper-man knows that nothing national interests the ordinary reader nearly so much as the doings of Royalty. A big Royal function—wedding, betrothal, funeral—will send up circulation much more than an election or anything else political. The Imperial tour of the Duke and Duchess of York was followed eagerly and pinned out on the map by hundreds and thousands, who would never see either of them. In a public procession any of the less known princesses will cause much more stir in the crowd than the Prime Minister. The trouble people of all classes will take to get a sight of a King or a Queen is really wonderful. Prints of Royalties are the favourite pictures in cottage and model blocks, and are prominent



in middle class houses ; they get scarcer as you get nearer to the top. Ask photographers whose photographs sell best ? All this is so irrational, and yet felt by everybody to be so sound, that only an irrational explanation will suffice ; which accounts for the rationalist being always astray in these matters. He who is not too big or too "intellectual" to believe in a Divine Power investing a King can sympathise with Royalty's irrational attraction for the multitude and gauge its significance.

To the self-governing Dominions, to the native people of India, to the small British communities scattered over the world, the King is the Empire in a more vivid way than to us at home. They feel that he is their King as much as he is our King ; that loyal duty to him gives them equal fellowship in all the traditions and all the splendour of the British name. The person of the Sovereign is much more to them than are our political institutions : and this agrees with their recognition of the King's authority but not of the authority of the British Parliament. They acknowledge the acts of British Ministers in Imperial policy because they are the acts of the King, but the intervention of Parliament many of them do not acknowledge. And this is perfectly logical ; for if they admit any power in the British Parlia-

ment to dispose of matters of Imperial interest and so affecting them as much as us, they put themselves under us, Parliament being in theory the people. But the act of a Minister is in a different category. His authority according to a very general colonial view derives solely from the King, who is equally over us and over them.

It is true Lord Salisbury proposed to pass an Act of Parliament imposing on Newfoundland certain conditions as to French fishing rights which the colony was most unwilling to accept. But the whole proceeding was greatly resented by the colony. It was asserting a right in the people here to coerce the people of a colony. It was an unfortunate incident, and, had the colony in question been as strong as Canada or Australia, things would have taken a different course.

It may be that legally this colonial contention is wrong ; it certainly does not square with the Colonial Laws Validity Act : but that is not the point. The point is that, right or wrong, this view is in fact not uncommon among citizens of the Dominions. It is, at any rate, a perfectly rational view, and any plan that is incompatible with it will have more difficulty in getting acceptance from the Dominions than one that admits it. Even if convinced that their constitutional position was not legally

sound, it is doubtful if those who had accepted it would agree to any plan that was inconsistent therewith. The scheme here set out is, at any rate, entirely in sympathy with Dominion sentiment in this matter. The Imperial Council, being independent of all parliaments alike, and responsible only to the King and people of the Empire, stands in exactly the same relation to all constituent States. The question of the Imperial status of the British Parliament would not even arise. The Imperial Government would be truly His Majesty's Government, and as such the whole Empire would have no difficulty in recognising it.

The King would appoint the members of the Imperial Council. Obviously it would defeat one of the main objects of the scheme, the elimination of party, if members of Council were elected. It would be even worse to leave it to the Parliaments or the State Ministries to select them. Every vice of the Parliamentary system would then be brought to play on the Imperial Council. Men would be put forward for seats on the Council not because of fitness or capacity as men of action, but as a reward for "political services," which would mean mainly their power of interesting large audiences or their influence with the Press. Slickness in parliamentary debate would, no doubt, also count.

The King in making choice of original members of the Council would necessarily seek advice on all sides. He would consult leading men of all classes and groups both here and in the Dominions. Naturally, he would turn to his regular advisers, his Ministers, both British and Colonial. But he would be under no constitutional necessity to accept their views or even to give them any special weight. It would perhaps be unfortunate if he did. A parliamentary politician, no matter how eminent, is likely to prefer a parliamentarian. Happily, there are always one or two big men in public life, men equally great in and out of Parliament, who could be trusted to look without as well as within "political circles" for choices for the Imperial Council. It is not improbable that these would lean rather to men who had not been parliamentarians. Generally, while it should not be a disqualification for service on the Imperial Council that a man was or had been in Parliament, it still less should be a qualification for it. Perhaps one might put it this way : there would be a presumption against the parliamentarian, the party politician, but the presumption would be rebuttable. It is practically certain that the Council would always include one or two men who had had large experience of and attained eminence in political life ; so that it might be desirable that other

members of the Council should be of a different type. Certain limiting conditions would be imposed on the King's choice. The members representing Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Newfoundland and South Africa, must respectively be citizens of the Dominion they represent. It may be that from time to time one or other of the Dominions would gain by having as a representative a particularly able man not of that colony. But the importance of the Council being in close touch with the whole Empire is paramount. The people of a self-governing state would never feel quite in sympathy with an Imperial Government that did not include one of their own fellow citizens. Nationalist sentiment would not be conciliated by representation no matter how able, if the representative were not "one of us." Nor is there much fear that even one of the smaller Dominions would be unable to supply a man competent to serve on the Council, though, of course, it might happen that a bigger man could be got from without.

Assuming that the Council consisted of ten members, five of whom must be citizens of the Dominions, it would be reasonable for the present, in view of relative white population and wealth, that the remaining five should be citizens of the United Kingdom.

It would also be well that one of the members



of Council should be a sailor and another a soldier, who would be in charge of the Admiralty and War Office respectively. This is not to say there might not be other soldiers and sailors on the Council besides these.

Also at least one member of Council should be a member of some responsible trade union. Organised labour is one of the most powerful elements in the Empire, and no Imperial Government could succeed that was not in sympathetic touch with it. Whether the Labour Member of Council could also represent a Dominion might be a matter for discussion. Certainly there could be no disability on a Dominion representative being also a trade unionist; but it probably would be better always to have a Labour representative distinct from the Dominion members and the heads of departments.

Should it be a condition that one of the members must be an Irishman? There is much to be said for it. An unfortunate political past has tended to estrange Ireland from Imperial Government. It would be more than sad, if, when a new start was being made in the Government of the Empire with the express object of drawing all its peoples closer together, Irishmen were to look on indifferent, feeling they were not concerned in the new move. Ireland has never lacked brilliant men in the

service of the State. Obviously in view of past associations it would be wise to select as the Irish Member of Council some distinguished public servant who has lived apart from political and parliamentary circles. The names of many great Irishmen who have served as soldiers or administrators out of the United Kingdom suggest themselves at once as examples of the type desired. In the event of Ireland being reorganised on an antonomous or Home Rule basis, she would certainly be entitled to have a representative on the Imperial Council, and that representative must be an Irishman. Should any part of Ireland remain beyond the jurisdiction of the Home Rule Government, the Irish representative could not be taken from that part; but there would be nothing to prevent Irishmen still governed directly from Westminster serving on the Council as United Kingdom representatives.

Obviously from an Imperial point of view the adoption of the plan set out in this book would greatly reduce the importance of the Home Rule question, and would remove many of the more serious difficulties most Unionists have felt in accepting any policy of Home Rule.

If it is asked: Why not a Scotch member and a Welsh member? it is difficult to conceive a British Imperial Council into which a Scotchman had not forced entry; and as to Wales,

in these days can one conceive of Wales being overlooked ? England perhaps of all the partners is most in danger of being forgotten.

The King's choice would also be under one disability. No member of Council could at the same time be a member of any State Parliament, British or Colonial, or of any State Ministry. His position would become impossible if he were.

Who should be chairman or president, and who should represent the different departments under the Council's control, would probably best be left to the Council itself to decide. No doubt the King would have his view as to the best man for president, and would not hesitate to let the Council know it. The Council being a small body and not deliberating in public, there would be no delicacy about introducing the King's name and considering his advice.

The first Council appointed, the King in filling up subsequent vacancies would probably be mainly guided by the advice of the existing members ; who by experience and by their position should best be able to judge. Or would there be no question of being guided ? Would the King have no option ? Would it be his duty to accept the advice of his Ministers, the members of the Council, in this as in every other matter whether he personally agreed with it or not ? This raises a question as to the whole

position of the Sovereign on the setting up of a new order, which the creation of a Council of Empire would amount to. Would this step be so really a new start that the old convention of the King acting solely through his Minister no longer held? Or would it be no more than a change in constitutional detail, political conditions in other respects remaining as they were before? Generally it has been assumed here that constitutionally there would be no changes except such as necessarily resulted from the creation of the Imperial Council. But this does not help us in considering the position of the Crown. It is possible plausibly to argue both that the new arrangement must involve a modification of the Crown's position, and that it need not. It would be possible to define the position of the King in any Act or Acts setting up the Imperial Council, but it would probably be very much better to leave it to settle itself.

It seems likely that in fact the Crown would take a more or less direct part in appointing the members of the first Council and setting the new machinery to work. If in this the King acted only on advice of Ministers, it would mean that the new order was set going entirely by Ministers under the old order, there being no other Ministers by whom to act. A Council not responsible to Parliament would be ap-

pointed by parliamentary Ministers, which is not reasonable, and could hardly work for the best success of the new order. The natural way would be for the King as outside and above Parliament—on whom both old and new orders equally hung—to take the initiative in getting the new order to work. Whether after that he would act in everything Imperial only on the advice of the Imperial Council as now only on the advice of his Ministers, time would settle, and settle best. There is no fear in these days of mischievous encroachment by the Crown. It is likely indeed that before long it would come to be established that the King acted entirely on the advice of his Imperial Ministers ; though the appointment to vacancies on the Council might well be an exception. If it were within the exclusive power of existing members of the Council to fill up the membership whenever there was a vacancy, it might lead to a kind of in-breeding, to a stereotyped official character. Naturally the recommendation of the Council would have great weight, but it need not be conclusive. If it is not to be conclusive, the King must have the constitutional right to make appointments to the Council on his own motion. He would not, it may be assumed, appoint against the wishes of existing members ; but he might appoint independently of them. In other words, he would not thrust



upon them a man to whom they objected, but he might not take the man they asked for.

The duration of the appointment is a question of great importance. It must be of such considerable length that members of the Council could feel that they were securely in the saddle and not exposed to risks of interruption before their plans had time to mature. They must be put beyond any temptation to hurry. It is one of the serious weak points in nearly all parliamentary systems that Ministers, never being sure how long they may be in power, are tempted to bring things to a head before they have had time to develop. They naturally are anxious to crowd as much as they can into their own term of office. They cannot wait to take long views. One of the gains reasonably to be hoped for from an Imperial Council is the correction of this habit in government. Give such a Council a good long term of office, independent of the chances of party politics, with nothing to gain from haste, and it would be able to settle down quietly to steady work. It would have time to think; the atmosphere in which it would work would favour thought. It would have no House of Commons to distract its attention from the real issues; and it should not as a rule need to work at very high pressure.

Should then its members be appointed for life? Could their good sense be trusted to

retire when they were incapacitated by age or other infirmities? That is what in fact happens with the leaders of public life—the men who govern the country—as things are now. A fixed retiring age undoubtedly has its bad side: it often withdraws from active life the best men for the work they were engaged on, men still in full possession of their powers. If possible, a hard and fast limit should be avoided; some men grow old so much more quickly than others that to fix for all the same retiring age is quite unscientific. In many services it may be unavoidable; but such an arrangement would be wholly unsuitable to a supreme Council of ten. At the same time it would be taking an unnecessary risk to allow every member to remain on the Council as long as he thought fit. Experience of political life shows very clearly to what that may lead. The ideal is a fixed tenure of office long enough to give the holder a chance in favourable conditions of doing the utmost of which he is capable, but not long enough to induce slackness or subject the office to the shortcomings of senility. There can be no necessarily best span of life for an appointment, but ten years uninterrupted will always give a man a fair chance, and is not so long that an unfortunate appointment will work irreparable mischief. Original members of the Council might be appointed for ten years. Their

tenure of office would determine at the end of that time, but it would be wise to make them eligible for reappointment. We could not afford to lose good men who were still available for service. Members appointed to fill up an accidental vacancy happening during the decennium would hold office for ten years from the date of their appointment. The Council itself, unlike Parliament, would never determine; there would never be a new or an old Council. At the end of the first ten years all the original members would cease to be councillors, but re-appointment would operate from the moment the ten years were up so that there would be no break in continuity. Similarly the re-appointment of members put on the Council subsequently would follow immediately on the determination of their ten years of office.

In this way the King would have an opportunity of introducing new blood into the Council more frequently than at the end of every ten years from the beginning of the Council. The responsibility of deciding whether or not to re-appoint would not be light; sometimes no doubt it would bring about a very difficult and delicate position; but the King would have the assistance of first-rate advice. Other members of the Council would be able to help him in the case he would find most difficult—and perhaps painful—of all, the case where

a very distinguished but ageing member of long service on the Council wished for re-appointment but was not really equal to the work. Such a situation demands judgment, strength, tact and manner in the highest degree, but no arrangement can prevent it sometimes arising in every branch of public life. In the ordinary course no doubt members of the Council would be re-appointed, for those who were getting too old or found the work too heavy for them would resign or let it be known that they did not desire to be re-appointed after their ten years were up. There is the danger of re-appointment becoming practically invariable—it would, of course, be the line of least resistance for the King—but the Press and public would probably check such a tendency. Anyway, vacancies would be sure to occur by the various accidents of so long a span as ten years.

Then there is the question whether fixity of tenure should be absolute during the ten years for which the appointment was made. Undoubtedly, it should be practically absolute, but it might not be safe to provide no legal means of getting rid of a member during his natural term of office. There is always the risk of some wholly abnormal development. Suppose he wholly incapacitates himself by drink or suffers a hopeless nervous breakdown, yet will not resign? Perhaps it might be provided

that the King could remove a member from office at any time on the written petition of all his colleagues on the Council. The necessity of unanimity amongst his colleagues would be protection enough against oppression, but would not preclude action in very serious cases.

Members of Council would of course be paid and presumably at about the same rate as Cabinet Ministers are paid now. No member of Council would be able to sit in either house of any Parliament within the empire. Parliament, whether British or Colonial, not being competent constitutionally to deal with Imperial affairs, a member of the Council would in Parliament have no reason of being ; and daily association with parliamentary and party circles would not be good for him. Besides, he could not be in the Lower House, and with great difficulty even in the House of Lords, and not at all in any other Upper House, without belonging to and being an effective member of one party or another, which would be totally incompatible with his position on the Imperial Council. Consistently, discussion of matters transferred to the Imperial Council should not take place in Parliament. It would be idle for Parliament to debate questions with which it had no power to deal, and it should be out of order. This need hardly be laid down formally in an Act : the House itself could deal with



it. No Government would care to encourage questions which it could not answer or speeches on matters beyond Ministers' control. Members who insisted on talking at length on questions proper to the Imperial Council, not to the House, would soon become a nuisance, and steps in the form of a standing order would probably be taken to restrain them. But every citizen would have the right to put questions to the Council in writing, which, if in proper form, and the public weal allowed, would be answered. There would be subjects, it is true, of interest common both to the Imperial Council and to Parliament—labour questions, for instance,—and Parliament must of course be free to discuss them. Both War Office and Admiralty are large employers of labour and Members of Parliament discussing labour matters could not be debarred from mentioning in a speech on some general industrial topic dockyard or arsenal labour, though neither Ministers nor Parliament would have power to interfere in any way between the Imperial Council and the men it employed. A regular debate on a current dispute between Admiralty or War Office and some of its men would be a different thing. But on the whole it would probably be best to leave that too to the discretion of the House or of the Government. There would,

no doubt, from time to time be difficulties in deciding whether a particular matter were entirely for the Imperial Council or of interest common to Council and Parliament. It would be for the Speaker or Chairman of Committee to decide. If the Council thought the decision prejudicial to its work, its Chairman would no doubt confer privately with the Prime Minister and a *modus vivendi* would be reached. These things are not usually difficult to arrange when there is good will on both sides ; and it is party that prevents this good will. Arrangement between Parliament and a non-party body like the Council would be easier than between two parties.

The Council's duty in the use of the Referendum would need to be defined with some precision. It should be made compulsory on the Council to refer certain defined questions to the country. Every year the Army, Navy and Foreign estimates would have to be submitted and approved by the people : in short an annual Imperial Budget, covering the whole expenditure of the Imperial Council. This would be a statement of the military and naval establishment proposed for the year (including rates of pay) in terms comparative with the year preceding. All the ordinary proposals of the Council for the year would be submitted together and accepted or rejected *en bloc*.

A Memorandum (in readable easy language, if possible) explanatory of the actual questions referred might be issued with the question form shortly before the voting day.

But questions of a certain defined class would have to be referred specifically, and not on the same day as the ordinary annual Referendum. These would include such organic changes as the introduction of compulsory service or its extension or restriction or alteration in the number of year's service.

In addition to these compulsory Referenda the Council should have the power to take a Special Referendum when it thought fit. Unforeseen questions might arise that did not fall within the category of any of the compulsory Referenda, but the Council might wish to take the view of the people upon them.

It would be desirable for the Council to publish an annual report which would be a survey of the Empire for the year. Blue books and White papers would be issued by the departments concerned as they are now; and the Council would no doubt send frequent communications to the press, which would take the place of answers to arranged questions in Parliament on matters of emergency or of critical interest.

In this way the public would be kept in touch with Imperial affairs as closely as now;

in fact more closely, for the touch would be a truer one. In ordinary times imperial questions reach the general public mainly through the distracting medium of party debate in Parliament or party writing in newspapers. Under the government of a non-party Council the public would be able to think of Imperial matters unmixed with "politics," and not a few would be only too glad to do so. They alone would regret the disappearance of debates on foreign policy whose interest was in the political game rather than in the questions debated. The press would be as free as ever to discuss all foreign and Imperial questions. It would fearlessly criticise both the policy and methods of the Imperial Council, and its significance in this sphere would be greater than it is now. The press would then have to fulfil some of the legitimate, though generally ill-performed, functions of Parliament. It would be the national critic of Imperial policy and the national ventilator of Imperial questions. This office it could perform in a non-party spirit, and it is likely that many papers would make it a point of pride to keep their treatment of foreign and imperial questions free of party taint. The new position occupied by Imperial policy would, it is to be hoped, lead to the appearance of high class Reviews entirely devoted to those subjects. There would be

an end of the present dilemma which practically leaves only a choice between party discussion of these subjects and no discussion at all.

It has lately been laid down by irresponsible wisdom that "Without (a Parliament) no genuine discussion of foreign affairs can take place, and government becomes a secret committee which need not report." Well, whatever might happen without a Parliament, it is certain there is no genuine discussion of foreign affairs in this country with one: and has not been for many years. Does this very confident authority on constitutional machinery really suppose that the Government is not now and was not before the war "a secret committee" so far as foreign policy is concerned? Does he really think that Parliament is taken into the Government's confidence? That all the items of the House of Commons count in the direction of foreign policy? That the few speeches made on foreign affairs make any difference in what is done? (They may make a difference to the speaker's career: that is all). Why, not half the members of the Cabinet itself are really in the confidence of the Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister on foreign questions. This writer could hardly help knowing all these things; yet he puts forward Parliament as the remedy!

Sometimes, when an important change was to be Referred, the Council would probably



descend into the arena, arguing and explaining by letters or articles in the papers or even by appearance on the platform. In the event of its annual programme being rejected it would have to put the position vigorously and clearly before the public in order to secure the acceptance of an amended scheme which would be submitted later. Would this happen often? Would the public show an irresponsible spirit and reject the arrangements for the year without thought of consequences? Suppose, it may be objected, the Empire rejects not the annual programme both original and amended year after year? Well, no doubt the whole system would collapse. But so would any system if those who are to work it determine instead to wreck it. It is reasonable to assume ordinary sense of responsibility and not mere levity in the people of the British Empire. Nothing could be easier than to make the present parliamentary system unworkable, if the country had the levity to do it. But let English men and women understand what is asked of them and they will act reasonably. They might refer back the Council's annual programme through discontent with some part of it. But it would be apparent what was the obnoxious feature and the Council would either modify, give way, or convert the public to its plan. It is most unlikely the Empire would reject the

whole arrangement en bloc twice following. Or the Council might refer the programme again with the omission of the vexed questions, which might be reserved for a Special Referendum.

It cannot be denied that the whole business of the Referendum has some affinity with "politics" and political methods; and the management of the Referendum would distract the Council's attention to some extent from its proper object—the consideration of Imperial issues on their merits only. The Council would be forced sometimes to consider not only what was best but also what would be acceptable to the people. But so must popular government of any kind. Moreover the distraction would be incomparably less under the plan here proposed than under a parliamentary system. Trying to get public assent to a specific proposal by argument is utterly different from trying to get yourself preferred to a rival by all varieties of persuasion.

The workability of the Referendum in a vast Empire scattered over the world seems, at any rate at first sight, a "very large order." But cable and wireless telegraphy have made many impossible things possible. In these days there would be no greater difficulty in conducting a Referendum all over the Empire at once than in one of its constituent Dominions alone. The form would be settled by the Council here

and would then be cabled or wirelessly to the proper office in every unit of the Empire : where it would immediately be printed and circulated. The Council would have a regular agent in every Dominion in the person of the Governor and his staff. It would take no longer to circulate this in Australia or Canada and take the answers of the electorate than it would if the Referendum had originated in and been peculiar to one of those Dominions. The figures for the Dominion would be counted there and the total would be communicated to the Imperial Council without delay. The totals from all the Units of the Empire should reach the Council very soon after the Referendum had been taken—on the same or nearly the same day or days everywhere—and the grand result could be published the next day in London and all over the Empire. It would take longer to circulate the Annual Survey and other publications of the Council, but fore-sight could always provide the time necessary.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### FINANCE

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**T**HERE would naturally be a Finance Member of Council, whose duty it would be to watch expenditure and keep the Council informed of and alive to the financial side of every measure proposed. The members representing the Admiralty and War Office would frame estimates of the needs of their departments as they do now, and would lay them before the Council. There they would be fully discussed and criticised, and no doubt there would sometimes be a struggle between the Military or Naval member and the Finance member, though the temptation to reduce the strength of the forces for the sake of financial appearances would be very small compared with the strain to which a party Government is exposed. The Council having reached agreement, the Finance Minister would draw up a complete estimate of expenditure of all sorts for the coming financial year to be included in the annual Referendum; which would take

place at a date, which in the event of rejection would leave the Council ample time to consider the situation and revise the estimates for a second Referendum before the end of the financial year. The Council would thus not be left without supplies. The estimates approved by the people, the Finance member would then proceed to apportion the total amount required for the Imperial services among the constituent states of the Empire proportionately to their annual income or their taxable value.

Nothing would be charged against India, which pays her own way, and in keeping up the forces required for Indian defence makes at the least a fair contribution to the Imperial services. It would be foolish to alter the present system of Indian Government merely in order to bring it formally into line with the rest of the Empire; whereby, moreover, the Empire would lose financially, for on a basis of annual income India would contribute less than she pays now. Ultimately, the Secretary of State for India, representing the Imperial Government, would decide in case of differences from the Indian Government as now; and he would annually present an Indian budget to the Council as now to Parliament; and the figures would be published. There would not need to be any change in the conduct of the India Office.

This apportionment of Imperial charge among



the units of the Empire—United Kingdom, Dominions, and Crown Colonies—would mean to most of them an increase of taxation. Their present contributions to Imperial service would then be brought into the common expenditure of the Empire, and must be set against the levy under the new scheme; but it would usually leave a balance against the Dominion. It is more than possible that some of the units of Empire would not, on a just review of their position, be able to contribute on a strictly proportionate basis—proportionate to annual income or taxable value. An exactly proportionate contribution might mean much more to one State than to another. A small unit, whose income was not large and resources comparatively small or as yet undeveloped and so demanding all available capital, might be paying a great deal more than a richer and more advanced Dominion, if it contributed on the same basis. Therefore, it might be wise or indeed necessary to establish a graduated basis of contribution. This would no doubt tell heavily against the United Kingdom; but in any event the “home” population must expect for a long time to come to take the lion’s share of the burden of Imperial expenditure. They will not “jib” at it. They have had this honour for long: after all noblesse oblige. The basis and method of graduation would be discussed and settled by the Council:

the Dominion members looking after the interests of the State they represented respectively.

The Imperial budget of expenditure having been approved by the people and apportioned, the Finance member of Council would then make precepts on the British Treasury and all the Dominion treasuries. The Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Finance Ministers of the other States of the Empire must accept the precept without amendment except that it would be open to any of them to show that the amount of the precept was not correctly calculated on the basis legally established; mistakes in arithmetic must, of course, be corrected. The Council's precepts having been correctly made, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Finance Ministers would have to collect the money and pay it in to the Imperial Treasury by a fixed time. Parliament would have no power to vary the precept of the Imperial Council in any way. The Chancellor of the Exchequer presenting his budget would naturally point out very clearly to the House for what proportion of the total expenditure and the taxation required to meet it he was not responsible. Some members might criticise the Council's estimates, but the Government would probably refrain from joining in the discussion, and, if challenged, would content themselves with pointing out that these items of expenditure were

not within their province. Should the point of excessive expenditure and taxation figure prominently at an election, the party in power could be trusted to make the country thoroughly understand that Parliament and the Ministry had nothing to do with the amount spent on the Army and Navy; which would certainly be put forward as the main cause of the heavy National Bill. The public might also be reminded that it already approved this expenditure, if it had, by the Referendum previously held. There is no reason to think that the Chancellor of the Exchequer or a Dominion Finance Minister would unjustly incur any serious odium for expenditure which was no fault of his. The Metropolitan Borough Councils do not seem to chafe at having to collect the county rate, which they have no hand in fixing, and which meets expenditure entirely outside their control. It is made clear to the ratepayer that the County Council and not the Borough is responsible for that portion of the rate, and that seems to be enough. In the unlikely event of a British or a Dominion Government refusing or failing to collect its Imperial quota, the Imperial Council would have the right (conferred expressly by the Statute creating the Council) to take the place of the defaulting or recalcitrant Government and itself collect the contribution payable by that Government


to the Council. Every Government must have the power ultimately to compel payment by the taxpayers of taxes necessary to carry out the duties that Government has undertaken. The Council would have the right to use all the local machinery of collection, including the courts and execution, and, if needed, the Imperial military forces. If the British or a Dominion Government and all its agents refused to obey and resisted the Imperial Council, that would mean rebellion, and the situation to be faced would be that of a constituent unit of Empire trying to secede. A less remote, indeed, quite a possible contingency, is that of a contributory State, thinking it was being rated in an unjust amount to Imperial purposes, passively refraining from collecting the money as a protest. The Council would then step in and collect for itself. This however would involve something more than collection: for, the defaulting Government not having budgetted for enough money to include the Imperial charge, the Council would have to consider ways and means and settle what new additional taxation should be imposed to produce the amount required.

It may seem unsound that the Imperial Council should have the power to spend but not the responsibility of finding the money. It is as though the Council drew a cheque for

Parliament to honour. What would happen to an arrangement by which one man was to run up the bills and another man had to meet them? The analogy of the private person involves a fallacy. The Chancellor of the Exchequer does not have to find the money; the taxpayers find the money. As Chancellor of the Exchequer he does now impose expenditure which others have to meet: in so far as he is a taxpayer himself, he helps to pay for the things he is buying for the nation. It would be the same, so far, with the Imperial Council. In both cases it is the taxpayers that would find the money and not the authority that incurred the expenditure or imposed the taxes.

But the Imperial Council would not have to consider in what form the taxpayers should be required to contribute the money, nor would they have to collect it. The Chancellor of the Exchequer or the Finance Minister has to do both.

The total amount to be spent in the year on Imperial defence and policy is essentially an Imperial concern; it is not particular or local; but the way in which the people of a particular State of the Empire shall make their contribution to this common burden of expenditure is particular, and should therefore be settled by a particular and not the Imperial Government. Countries vary in the character of their resources,





in the habits of their people, in the stage of their development. Therefore not the same kind of taxation suits all. A tax might be fair and lightly borne in the United Kingdom which would be felt to be very burdensome in one or other of the Dominions: a tax might be very productive in one colony and not at all in another; long custom may have produced complete acquiescence—whether of content or indifference—in a form of taxation in one country whose novelty in another would provoke active opposition. It would be impossible for the Imperial Council to devise a scheme of taxation which would be fair and would suit the many and widely differing States of the Empire. Leave taxation to the different particular Governments and there is far better prospect of the taxes being suited to the needs and character of the country. The incidence of taxation, which is a question not of how much but how, interests the people more than its total amount. There is seldom any real popular excitement about the amount of national expenditure or the burden of taxation, but there is often acute excitement about a particular tax. Therefore, if there is anything at all in representative Government, it is the representative body which should be responsible for the form in which the people are made to contribute to State expenses. So far as the form of taxation goes, the scheme

here proposed would leave things just as they are.

But though the Council in settling the amount to be spent would be independent of Parliament, and Parliament in settling how the money was to be raised would be independent of the Imperial Council, naturally the Finance Minister of the Council and the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Dominion Finance Ministers would be in one another's confidence. They would be in constant communication and would work together. The Finance Branch of the Imperial Council would be in close touch with the British and the Dominion treasuries. Everything would be done to dovetail their respective functions. Friction is always possible, and there might be a certain amount of jealousy. But that would not put the new scheme of Government in any worse case than the present.

As to the control of the Imperial Council and the risk that its irresponsibility for the selection and collection of taxes might introduce extravagance, its members would be sane and experienced men, probably the reverse of irresponsible in temper. They would know that there must be reason in expenditure, and would have regard for public opinion. There would be the check of the Imperial Auditor and Controller's office, and there might well be an independent unofficial committee to do what

the Committee of Public Accounts does now. The Institute of Chartered Accountants might be asked to select a committee for this purpose annually. Public spirited men, who need not all be accountants, could certainly be found to undertake this duty without fee, their expenses only being paid. Also, the Finance Branch of the Imperial Council would itself be a check on expenditure as is the Treasury now.

Popular control of finance would be secured as effectively by the Referendum as by Parliament. Constitutionally, as we all know, parliamentary discussion ranks high as a national bulwark against extravagance—every text-book tells you it is the main business of the House of Commons. It is amusing to compare the theory with facts. Parliament at any rate utterly failed to prevent very rapid and enormous increase in pre-war expenditure. Minute examination of expenditure by the House there is none: millions and millions are voted every year without question or comment; and when there is a debate on finance, it is hardly ever a serious examination of expenditure. It is usually a party move. So far as the House of Commons goes, a Government with a working majority can be as extravagant as it likes: it will suffer nothing there for its want of thrift.

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## CHAPTER IX

### SOME FORMALITIES

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**T**HE work of building up a new Imperial Constitution would naturally fall to a special Imperial Conference, set in motion perhaps by the annual Empire Cabinet. Hitherto these conferences have rather carefully kept away from such questions, but times have changed and this shyness is wearing off. Close co-operation in the war has familiarised the different states within the Empire with the idea of closer permanent union.

A resolution in favour of closer organic union would perhaps first be passed; the same Conference might go so far as to pronounce in favour of an Imperial Council. This would probably result in the United Kingdom and the Dominions appointing a delegacy with express instructions to frame a constitution based on an Imperial Council. It is not likely that the delegacy would be given power absolutely to commit the government which it represented; but it is probable that a scheme agreed on

by them would be accepted. It would then have to be submitted to Parliament here and in the Dominions.

If a scheme were adopted on the lines traced in the foregoing chapters, the Bill setting up the Imperial Council could not be presented in absolutely identical form to the British Parliament as to the Dominion Parliaments, since the change it would make in the status of the British Parliament would not apply to the Dominions.

The adoption of such a scheme would be a bigger or at any rate more debateable question for the United Kingdom than for the Dominions. To them it would be an increase of power leaving their parliamentary system directly unaffected. To the United Kingdom in some ways, though more in appearance than in fact, it would be a great change. Men to whom their parliamentary career is everything, who conceive the whole world from the point of view of a member of the British Parliament, could not be expected to welcome a change which, diminishing from the power of Parliament, reduces their own importance at the same time. Many members of Parliament, of course, are not of this sort, but many are and these, we may be sure, would fight hard against the new plan. If they succeeded in their opposition, the matter would have to be taken to the



electorate ; who, if in favour of the plan, would return members pledged to vote for it. Or the government of the day might wish to take the view of the people by Referendum. If they thought it necessary to obtain parliamentary sanction to this, it would be difficult for members to oppose it. It would look as if they were afraid to take the opinion of the people. Anyway it is certain that if the Referendum went in favour of the new plan, it would soon pass through Parliament.

If both Government and Parliament were against and refused to take a vote of the people upon the plan, there would still be the last resource—force. This is not a fantastic or a wicked suggestion. Quite lately force has played a decisive part in British politics. It is quite certain that if the Ulster Unionists had not made a very resolute demonstration of force, a scheme of Irish Home Rule would have been imposed upon them against their will, though not unconstitutionally. They may have been right or they may have been wrong ; that is not the point. The point is that quite recently force was resorted to for a political end with complete success. After the war, if there were a strong body of sober opinion that the Government and the parliamentarians were preventing the country from expressing its view on a constitutional change

which happened to lessen the power of Parliament. a short way would probably be found to get rid of the obstacle. A large proportion of the electorate would by that time have received a military training. There would be no fighting, of course, for the Government, realising what was likely to happen, would give way and the people would vote on the plan. If they voted against it, the matter would drop for a time; if they voted for it, Parliament would pass the Bill.

The Bill would put the Imperial Council for all Imperial purposes very much in the place of the British Cabinet under the old régime except that the Council would not need to go to Parliament for anything. The draftsman of the Bill would accomplish this by the proper legal formulæ expressing the technically correct constitutional steps, of which the effect would be to make the Council, under the King, supreme over the whole Empire, subject to the obligation to consult the people by Referendum. This obligation the Bill would define. What H.M. Government can now do without consulting Parliament the Council would be able to do without a Referendum. Any measure proposed by the Council and endorsed by Referendum would have the force of law and would be law: it would be an Act though not an Act of Parliament. It might be technically described as an Act of Empire.

It would of course require the King's signature. It would be the duty of every state or municipal authority in the Empire to enforce by its courts and police throughout its jurisdiction any Act of Empire or any direction legally given on the authority of Council.

The Bill would specifically define what points the Council was under compulsion to refer to the people and would empower the Council to refer other points at its discretion.

As partly declaratory of the Council's sphere of action and jurisdiction, the Bill would lay down that the Secretaries of State for Foreign Affairs, War, India, and the Colonies and the First Lord of the Admiralty must be members of the Imperial Council. This would automatically vest the administration of those offices in the Council. But the declaratory words must not limit by implication the action of the Council or its power to those offices.

The Bill would lay down that any act of the Council dealing with business wholly without its sphere of action, that is to say, local or state business proper to the British or a Dominion government or Parliament, and any act or resolution of the British or a Dominion Government dealing with business not proper to the United Kingdom or the particular Dominion was invalid as *ultra vires*.

This would involve a Supreme Court to decide disputes as to what was or was not proper to the Imperial Council or to a State Government or Parliament. This function could be perfectly fulfilled by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council to whom it would be open to either party to refer disputed points. There would be no need of any other distinctively Imperial Court than the Judicial Committee nor of Imperial police. The Imperial police would be the military.

The Bill would empower the British and every Dominion Government, with the consent of Parliament, to propose to the Imperial Council that it should take over any department now administered locally and administer it as an Imperial department, the Council accepting or refusing the proposal at its discretion; provided that the department proposed to be transferred was not necessarily local in its operations. To secure the observation of this proviso it might be required that the consent of the Judicial Committee be obtained to every such transfer. If the Council desired to take over a department from a State Government which that Government had not proposed it should take over, the Council could approach the State Government, and, if it was willing, the transfer could go forward. If not, the Council could suggest that the Imperial Council

and the State Government should jointly refer the question to the electorate of the particular State, both agreeing to abide by the result of the Referendum. If the State Government refused, the matter would drop, but could be brought up again after a reasonable interval.

Should the Council desire to amend its own constitution in a way that did not encroach on the powers of any State Government, the Bill would empower it to refer the proposed amendment to the people. If endorsed, the amendment would take effect and become law.

No legal way has yet been provided of amending the Council against its own will. But it is conceivable that the Council might develop in one direction or another undesirable or absolutely mischievous tendencies; it might prove insufficiently adaptable in form. Only experience can effectively test a constitution, and experience is almost certain to disclose points that will want correcting; and as it is at least possible that those working the constitution will not wish to make the correction, it is well to provide a legal means of doing this in spite of their obstruction—to be used only as a last resource. The obvious remedy for a deadlock caused by the Council refusing to Refer an amendment of its constitution obviously necessary or insistently demanded by important elements in the country is to leave it to the



King on his own motion to Refer the question to the people. This would be an extreme course, and would be resorted to only in the event of all other means to find a way out of the deadlock failing. The necessity of the King's intervention would be safeguard enough against precipitate or too frequent action. It is more likely than not that it would never be needed, but the knowledge that it was there, legally ready to be used, would not be a bad thing for the members of the Council.

It may be objected that this might expose the King to popular clamour in the event of his not putting the Referendum in motion on some occasion when there was some popular discontent with the Council. But the public cares little for constitutional questions: the matters on which a question of the King's intervention might arise would usually not excite the people at all. The matters within the Council's control that would most affect the people the Council must, willingly or unwillingly, refer to them. Should there arise a question affecting the Council's constitution which did happen to stir the public deeply, it is obvious that in a democratic country the Referendum would have to be put in motion. It is fairly certain that the Council would anticipate intervention by the King. If the Referendum should go in favour of the Council,

well ; if it should go against them it would be against them none the less when the King intervened, and they would appear in a worse light than if they had spontaneously gone to the people. The Council would, of course, know what the King meant to do. There would in practice be no conflict between King and people.

It is not meant that only the points taken in this chapter would find a place in the Bill establishing the new order. That Bill would embody all the constructive proposals hereinbefore made. But it seemed desirable to make clearer from the legal point of view certain points in the scheme hitherto rather implied than set out. Legally indeed, the scheme would involve many other consequent changes. But these are formal technicalities, which are better left out of a sketch which necessarily can be no more than suggestion.

THE END





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